

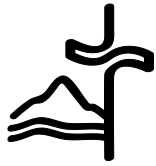


the **HEART** of Immanuel | God with Us

an introduction to membership

Contextualized for use by Immanuel Lutheran Church, LCMS in Sandy, OR. Special thanks to "The CORE" curriculum of CrossPoint Community Church (LCMS) Katy, TX, which provided helpful content and key structural inspiration to the author. Also thanks to the first group who faithfully attended in Spring 2012 and all who have since worked through this resource, for the helpful feedback reflected in this revision. This is a community project! Other sources cited throughout. All Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

15th Sunday after the Pentecost 2017 Revision 07



the HEART of Immanuel | God with Us

What's this about?

The HEART of Immanuel | God with Us is designed to give those who consider Immanuel their primary faith community an overview of our theological beliefs, values and our life together. In this course, we lay out the Biblical foundation for what we believe and what we practice as a community of faith in Jesus Christ. We consider this an essential step for all who desire not merely membership but leadership within Immanuel.

What is Church?¹

At its heart, the Church is the Body of Christ. It is both the mystical union of people with Christ and a training ground for nurturing agents of the new creation, bearers and bringers of Christ's love in this world. A place where people receive God's gifts in Christ and are invited to participate in the mission of the church.

Why membership?

Since the earliest days of Christianity (Acts 2: 42-47) followers of Jesus have gathered in *local* families of faith for hearing God's Word, receiving the Lord's Supper and baptism, for mutual support, local service and growth in grace while being transformed into the image of God (Rm.12:2; 2Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:11-16).

While all those who believe and are baptized are members of God's *universal family* (Eph. 2:19) each of us are called to be connected and committed to a *local family* where each of us can worship, learn and serve within the body of Christ for the sake of all creation. God does not give us His grace in Christ for our own sakes alone but for the sake of the whole world. We all have a part to play as together we are the hands and feet of Jesus in a world that needs Him. (Eph. 4:12)

Membership is the local church's means of bringing God's people into an accountable, committed relationship supporting a healthy and effective expression of God's family. Together we grow in our knowledge of Scripture, exhibiting Biblically transformed lifestyles, preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, nurturing generous, sacrificial attitudes and seeking ways to serve and influence our culture.

At Immanuel we have no desire to be a church of consuming observers who sit back and watch pastors/staff and a select few people do all of the work. We want the church to be the living Body of Christ in Sandy *and beyond*. We take discipleship (learning from Jesus how to live in relationship with God and one another) seriously, which is why we take membership seriously.

To those who have made the commitment of membership there is also a commitment from our pastor and staff, elders and council to serve foremost our members in prayer, counsel, service, teaching and other support as needed.

How do I become a member?

Essentially, the path to membership at Immanuel looks like this:

- Act like a member
 - *That is, worship regularly, get involved in learning and service*
- Read the HEART of Immanuel | God with us*
- Complete and submit the Membership Information Form**
- Have your Welcome to Immanuel Interview

*It's always best to read this with at least one other person. Always talk with Pastor about your reactions to this resource and expect help in finding a learning format best for you.

**This is included in this document but is available online at www.immanuelsandy.com.

¹ Adapted from "A Door Set Open: Grounding Change in Mission and Hope" by Peter L. Steinke. Alban.org. p.122

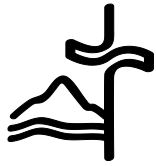


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Immanuel Life Together (part one) | week one

*so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.
(Romans 12:5 (ESV))*

Immanuel Lutheran Church| history

Mission has been at the heart of Immanuel since the very beginning. At the turn of the 19th century, a Portland man named A.E. Kern saw a need for Divine Service in Sandy. He gathered eleven people who signed a petition and sent it to the leaders of the Northwest District of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod asking them to establish a church in Sandy. The District called the Rev. H. H. Koppelman who was installed as pastor in Sandy in August 1901. The first church building was started with \$57 in pledges and was built on land donated by Mr Junker, owner of the Sandy Hotel. The first worship service in the new church was held Christmas Eve 1902. The original building still stands on Pioneer Street in the middle of Sandy. Immanuel Lutheran Church formally incorporated in 1907.

Immanuel's first pastors served preaching stations near Sandy. They would spend several days walking over uncertain forest trails to neighboring locations including Damascus, Dover, George, and Estacada. By 1913, the roads and economic conditions had improved enough that Immanuel's second pastor, the Rev. F. Dobberfuhr, was able to buy a car and travel more quickly to the mission locations.

Immanuel Elementary School began in 1904. Classes were held in the church until 1912 when the school building was completed. In 1907, only seven children attended the school, but over the years, the school flourished. In the 1947-1948 school year about 50 students were enrolled. Immanuel Lutheran School held classes until 1955.

In 1956, ground was broken for a new church building on Pleasant Street at the east end of Sandy. Members of the congregation and the community did much of the work, from cutting timber and sawing lumber to installing windows and woodwork in the church. Immanuel's present church building, was dedicated in 1959.

Immanuel celebrated the 100th anniversary of its founding in 2002. In 2008, the congregation dedicated an addition, which added a large entryway, additional restrooms, an elevator, three meeting rooms, fully paved parking, sidewalks and landscaping.

Since 2008, the congregation has developed land on the east end of the property into a park and playground for kids and families. Our youth group has remodelled the freestanding garage on the north side of the sanctuary for use as a dedicated youth room. Current building projects include ongoing Sanctuary revitalization and preventative maintenance.

Immanuel | denomination (common name, doctrine/tradition and identity)

Immanuel is a part of **The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod** (LCMS), a biblically conservative Christian denomination. Immanuel's affiliation with the LCMS is founded upon an unequivocal commitment to three key theological tenants:

- Man is saved solely by the **grace** of God.
God loves the people of the world, even though they are sinful, rebel against Him and do not deserve His love. He sent Jesus, His Son, to love the unlovable and save the ungodly.
- Man receives that grace solely through **faith** in Jesus Christ.
By His suffering and death as the substitute for all people of all time, Jesus purchased and won forgiveness and eternal life for them. Those who hear this Good News and believe it have the eternal life that it offers. Through His Word, God creates faith in Christ and gives people forgiveness through Him.
- God reveals this message to man solely in His **Word**.
We hold that the Bible is God's inerrant and infallible Word, through which He reveals Himself and does His work of convicting sin, calling to repentance, creating and eliciting faith. It is the sole rule and norm for faith and life.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod www.lcms.org

- The LCMS began on **April 26, 1847**, when 12 pastors representing 15 congregations signed a constitution that established "The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States" (Yeah, we're glad they later shortened the name).
- Today, the LCMS has more than **6,000** congregations, incorporating some **2.1 million** baptized members and **~9,000** professional church workers.
- The LCMS is divided into geographical districts. Immanuel is part of the **Northwest District** www.nowlcms.org. Synod and District officials serve congregations only in an advisory capacity.
- Congregations in the LCMS are **autonomous**. They own their property, call their own pastors and staff, and set their own budgets. However, they are part of a "synod" (Latin, meaning: "walking together") and thus agree to abide by the constitution of the overall church body. Immanuel's constitution is posted online.
- The LCMS is also renowned for its work in human care and disaster relief and particularly for its emphasis on **education**—with more than **2400** preschools, elementary schools, high schools, including ten universities and two seminaries.

Lutherans in general

- There are **~64 million** Lutherans belonging to 250 different autonomous Lutheran churches around the world.
- The **~9.5 million** Lutherans in North America belong to 21 different Lutheran church bodies.
- The largest of these at 3.7 million is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), though some recent re-missioning have resulted in new bodies forming out of ELCA. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) is next, followed by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) with ~400,000 members.
- Differences among Lutherans include ethnicity, views on Scripture and extent of their subscription to the Lutheran Confessions contained in the Book of Concord.

Immanuel | beliefs and values

This course will focus extensively on Immanuel's theology, practice and ministry values—covering everything from our view of Scripture to our emphasis on mission and culture. For those who seek to become members and leaders within our family of faith it is essential that members not only understand these core beliefs and values but accept and live them out in daily life. Essentially these are:

Our vision:

We see a church so compassionate that people are drawn from all walks of life into a learning, loving, living community of hope where questions are welcome, answers are discovered, and acceptance is freely given.

Our mission:

We are here to enrich lives by sharing the loving word and ways of Jesus.

Our values:

More *LEARNING*

We are always exploring God's Word in worship and study together. God speaks through His Word to reveal Himself to us and guides us to understand ourselves both as individuals and in our relationship to one another.

More *LOVE*

We strive to connect with others in our community to grow in grace-filled relationships. God's grace connects us to Himself through faith in Jesus and connects us to one another through love as He loves us.

More *LIFE*

We live with an attitude of hope. Together we welcome more of God's grace, forgiveness and peace. By faith and love we live new lives here in time and for eternity.

A summary of our beliefs: (A summary - for more go to www.lcms.org)

Lutheran Confessions:

Immanuel is a Confessional Lutheran Church. That means we subscribe to the historic Lutheran Confessions, a collection of texts contained in the [Book of Concord](#) dated 1580 A.D. These writings are **not** our Bible, rather they speak to the question of how we, as a Christian community, read the Bible for meaning. Among other things our Confessions speak to our beliefs concerning:

God

We believe, teach and confess that the one true God is the Triune God (Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:4); Father, Son and the Holy Spirit - three distinct persons of one and the same divine essence (plurality of persons; unity of substance), equal in power, equal in eternity and equal in majesty (Col. 2:9; Matt. 28:19).

Original Sin:

We believe, teach and confess that God, by the almighty power of His Word, created all things out of nothing. We also believe that man, as the principal creature of God, was specially created in the image of God, that is, in a state of righteousness, innocence and blessedness.

We affirm that Adam and Eve were historical human beings and their fall was a historical event, which brought sin into the world so that "since the fall of Adam all men who are propagated according to nature are born in sin" (Augsburg Confession, Article II). We confess that man's fall necessitated the gracious redemptive work of Jesus Christ and that fallen man's only hope for salvation from Sin is Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord.

The Person and work of Jesus Christ:

We believe, teach and confess that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Lord, and that through faith in Him we receive forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. We confess our works cannot reconcile us with God or merit forgiveness of sins and grace. We confess that we obtain forgiveness and grace only by faith when we believe we are received into God's favor for Christ's sake, who alone has been ordained to be the mediator and propitiation (debt eraser) through whom the Father is reconciled (Augsburg Confession, Article 20, para. 9).

The Scriptures:

We believe, teach and confess that all Scripture (66 Canonical books commonly known as The Holy Bible) is given by the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit and that God is therefore the true Author of Scripture—thus making it infallible, authoritative and the sole rule and norm for faith and life.

The Means of Grace:

We believe, teach and confess—in accordance with Scripture—that God offers and communicates to mankind the spiritual blessings of Christ, namely, the forgiveness of sins and the treasures and gifts connected therewith, only through the external means of grace ordained by Him.

These means of grace are the Word of the Gospel, in every form in which it is brought to man, and the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and of the Lord's Supper. (Acts 20:24; Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:23; Gal. 3:2; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Titus 3:5; Luke 22:19, 20; Matt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:23; Jer. 31:31-34)

The Church:

We believe, teach and confess that the church is the body and bride of Christ, whose primary mission is to make disciples of every nation through the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. The Church that is not "in mission," not sent and sending is not the Church. Other necessary activities of the church, such as ministering to people's physical needs, are to serve the church's primary mission and its goal that people will believe and confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Immanuel | leadership

Immanuel's leadership structure is a leadership model that consists of The Council, Elders, Immanuel Enrichment Center board (IEC) and various ministry teams according to present need. For more see the Church Manual posted at www.immanuelsandy.com.

The Council

A Council member at Immanuel Lutheran Church is a person who, by God's grace, endeavors to ensure the congregation is actively accomplishing its mission to enrich lives by sharing the loving word and ways of Jesus and as such has been set apart by the congregation to represent the membership by articulating mission and vision, initiating new ministries, evaluating existing ministries and ensuring responsible stewardship of financial and human resources.

The council appoints teams to address specific ministry needs as they arise.

Community Connections Team - A Community Connections Team member at Immanuel Lutheran Church is a person who, by God's grace, endeavors to support the congregation's efforts to honor our Lord's command to love our neighbors as ourselves in Sandy *and beyond*.

Finance Team - A Finance Team member at Immanuel Lutheran Church is a person who, by God's grace, endeavors to support the congregation's mission through faithful stewardship of the congregation's financial resources.

Facilities Team – A Facilities Team member at Immanuel Lutheran Church is a person who, by God's grace, endeavors to ensure the physical resources of this congregation including all buildings and grounds, plants, fixtures, furniture and technologies are maintained in support of the congregation's mission.

Children's Ministry Team - A Children's Ministry Team member at Immanuel Lutheran Church is a person who, by God's grace, endeavors to support the congregation's mission through growing ministries to Kindergarten through 5th grade children and their families.

Youth Team – A Youth Ministry Team member at Immanuel Lutheran Church is a person who, by God's grace, endeavors to support the congregation's mission through growing ministries to 6th through 12th grade children and their families.

Music Team - A Music Team member at Immanuel Lutheran Church is a person who, by God's grace, endeavors to support the congregation's life of worship and witness with contextually appropriate music in service to the proclamation of the Word of God in Sandy *and beyond*.

Elders

An Elder at Immanuel Lutheran Church is a man who, by God's grace, endeavors to be *for others* in Jesus name and as such has been set apart by the congregation to assist the Pastor in attending to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of people.

Immanuel Enrichment Center

An IEC board member at Immanuel Lutheran Church is a person, who by God's grace is set apart to assist in the general oversight of the operations of the Afterschool program, including all academic standards and professional and volunteer staff.

Homework | fifteen minute intensive

Please complete the following activities. They are designed to help you reflect on what we've discussed. Be ready to ask questions and defend your insights.

1. Preview www.lcms.org, www.nowlcms.org and www.immanuelsandy.com. Note anything of interest to you.

2. What part of Immanuel's Life Together do you appreciate the most?

3. With which part do you feel least comfortable? Why?

The Word, God's Word | week two

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.—Hebrews 4:12-13 (ESV)

What is the 'Word of God?' ²

A common answer: The 'Word of God' is the Bible. While this is not wrong, it is not the whole answer. Strictly speaking, the 'Word of God' encompasses the whole spectrum of how God speaks and does His work in this world. Just as humans use words to communicate, to command, to create, to maintain and establish relationships, so does God. God communicates and acts within a human world through the means of human language.

While some religions teach that God communicates and acts through intuition or mystical experience, Christians believe that God speaks and acts in real human words. God speaks in words that people can hear. God's Word written is accessible to all.

The Bible reveals God is a speaking God. God spoke and created all things (Gen. 1:3; Ps. 33:6; Jn 1:1-3). God, through the Holy Spirit, spoke to human beings in human language and used them to give us the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21). Every proclamation of God's truth, insofar as it is in harmony with Scripture, is God's Word delivered by human voice (Romans 10:13, 17). Finally, Scripture tells us that Jesus Himself is the Word of God made flesh (John 1:1-3, 14).

And this Word, whether spoken or written, enfleshed in Jesus or preached in a church, is powerful, a performative Word, that is, the Word of God says what it does and does what it says. The Word is the means by which God created all things. The Word is the means by which God continues to communicate with the world and is actively saving and making His people a new creation.

The Word | written

As we have said, God speaks His Word in various forms. The Old Testament tells us that He spoke through the human voice of leaders and prophets like Moses, Jeremiah and Isaiah. However, God then turned that prophetic human voice to written form, recording the words He had spoken and was speaking to them so that they might be the guide, rule and norm for His people. This written Word would then be accessible and available for all.

The message of the early church apostles—their preaching, teaching, and writing—was recognized as God's Word. Since the earliest days of Christianity, followers of Jesus have embraced the writings and teachings of not just the Old Testament but those of the New Testament as the authentic, authoritative, historically definitive, reliable Word of God. (Eph. 3:2-6; 1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Thess. 2:13, 2 Peter 3:1-2)

Together they comprise the full message of God given to mankind, *outlining the history of His work in creating, redeeming, and restoring the world through Jesus*. God is clear that He wants these Scriptures to be the ultimate authority for how we live our lives both as individuals and as a church. (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

The writings of the Old and New Testaments are often referred to as the Bible—a word derived from the Greek word simply meaning 'book.' The Bible is a compilation of 66 separate writings (39 in the OT and 27 in the NT). Over a period of roughly 1000 years God used more than 40 different people from every walk of life (including kings, poets, and fisherman) on three different continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe) and in three different

² Parts adapted from G.E. Veith's *The Spirituality of the Cross*, p. 36-37.

languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic) to bring His written Word to the world. It includes history, sermons, letters, a songbook—even architectural specifications and population statistics. Yet it has one, unified message. Why? Because it all has one author: God.

Divine in nature

Since God is the author of Scripture then it follows that it carries certain divine attributes. Chiefly we believe the Scriptures are *inerrant* (the authors are truthful according to their intended purpose in writing: to preserve the apostolic witness and to pass knowledge from generation to generation), *infallible* (totally trustworthy according to the authors' purpose), and *authoritative* (authority established by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead). Ultimately, God is the author. It is His Word. The Holy Spirit inspired the words contained in the Bible. (2 Tim. 3:16; Ps. 12:6; Ps. 119:89; 2 Sam. 7:28; Titus 1:2).

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of Scripture's divine nature is that it is living and life giving—which is to say, God is present and active within its pages. His Word has power. It is not as if God is in the ink and paper, but God is really present and active with the Word. In this Word, God is there waiting for readers and hearers to encounter Him in words of *law* where he convicts us of sin and guides us in living; and in words of *Gospel* where He promises forgiveness, making our relationship right with Him, promising eternal life with Him through the work of Jesus.

Countless Christians have experienced the power and the presence of God in the words of Scripture as they brought us to confession of our sin and stirred up hope and faith in Jesus. God is living and working in the written word drawing all people to Himself. (Heb. 4:12-13) We do not look for God apart from or beyond the Word where God speaks and does His work in this world.

Human in nature

The Scriptures also have an unmistakable human aspect to them. After all, God entered human history and worked through human beings and human language to put it all together. Therefore, it is important to remember a few key things: each of the writings has a real world historical context; they were written to specific groups and are comprised of different literary genres (history, narrative, song, poetry); they sometimes contain personal insights and opinions of the authors; and the original manuscripts were written in specific languages that require careful interpretation. While fully divine, the Scriptures are also fully human—even to the point where we can find grammatical and typographical errors.

Some people downplay the “humanness” of Scripture—saying it undermines its divinity. Yet God consistently reveals Himself working through human or earthly vessels to deliver His divine gifts and do His perfect will. He sent a “strong east wind” to divide the waters of the Red Sea and save the Israelites from slavery (Ex. 14:21-29); He flooded the earth with water to condemn sin and saved a select few with a big boat (Gen. 7); He was born as a human Himself in the person of Jesus—saving us through His real world death and resurrection (John 1:1-14).

God has always worked through human, earthy means to do his holy and divine work. In light of God's activity, we believe the Word of God is simultaneously fully divine and fully human.

What the Word is not

Having said some things about what Scripture is (human and divine), we must also say some things about what Scripture is not. Scripture is not a comprehensive answer to every conceivable question. God reveals what he reveals and God hides what He hides. Some things are unknown. God's ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:9); the Wisdom of God is foolishness to man (1 Corinthians 2:14); our understanding is soiled by sin (Romans 1:18-19) we see what we see only in part (1 Corinthians 13:12). God is God—we are not.

The Word | proclaimed

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ...So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10: 14, 17 ESV)

God has recorded His Word in Scripture. But He has also called His people to take those same Words—His message—and pass them on to one another and to all people, everywhere. And it is through those who speak His Word that He does His work: convicting of sin, correcting action and creating and eliciting faith in Jesus.

In the public life of the church, we see God's Word proclaimed in two important forms. In the sermon (insofar as it is faithful to Scripture), God speaks through the pastor to the entire community. Through His Word proclaimed God is teaching, guiding, challenging and forgiving the community week after week. Not the pastor—no, he is just the human vessel—but by God Himself. (Rom. 10:14-17)

We also see the proclaimed Word at work in corporate (everyone together) confession and forgiveness of sin; something long practiced in historic Christian worship. This takes place when, having confessed their sin, the pastor speaks God's Word of forgiveness to God's people by the authority Jesus has given (John 20:19-23).

Finally, in the life of the congregation we see God's Word proclaimed in baptism and Lord's Supper. Here God's Word and promise is spoken, announcing that one is being baptized in and into "the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19) and that we are taking and eating the very body and blood of Jesus, shed for the forgiveness of our sins. (Matt. 26:26-29)

In our private lives, we see the spoken Word of God at work too. As one member of Immanuel walks with another through a difficult time and lovingly shares that Jesus is her Rock and source of comfort, the Word of God is doing what it does. (Ps. 62) As a group of Christians gather for a Bible study and spend a few hours talking about forgiveness found in Jesus (Acts 4:12) the Word is in air, being heard and working in lives.

In all these things, we see that God's Word is active and "doing stuff"—it is teaching, forgiving and changing us. Through the human voice, the Word of God is alive and accomplishing His will.

The Word | made flesh

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14 ESV).

Finally, we believe that the Word of God has come to us in the Second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. This means that as Christians we believe God reveals Himself fully in the person of Jesus, in His life, death and resurrection (Heb. 1:1-3).

Everything that God is and all that God gives is revealed in Jesus, who was born into our world, walked in our shoes, died in our place, showed His power over death by rising and who is now sitting at the right hand of God the Father (Col. 3:1).

We believe that if we want to know what God is like: we look to Jesus. If we want to see God's power: we look to Jesus. If we want to enter into a relationship with God: we look to Jesus. If we want direction, guidance, hope, peace... anything we seek from the Creator; all of it is found in Jesus Christ alone (John 14:6-7; Col. 1:15-19; 2 Cor. 4:4).

Reading the Word for all its worth

The Bible is unlike other books. Anyone who can read, can read the Bible. However, reading the Bible for all its worth (As God intends for it to be read) is another matter.

We need to learn how to read the Bible. The Church as a community of faith in Jesus, existing since the Day of Pentecost, is where we learn to read the Bible for all its worth. Though we recognize that some people through years of study and academic discipline have learned more about how to read the texts and therefore are given a hearing different than a first time reader, still, we believe the Bible is best read in community with a range of experience and knowledge. Reading the Bible together with a great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 11:1 - 12:2), we hear the ancient witness of those who, by faith, looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God (Hebrews 11:10).

Having read the word we confess, make public, what we believe the Bible teaches. This confession is contained in the Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, dated 1580 A.D. These confessions are not our Bible, rather they speak to the question of how we, as a community of faith, read the Bible for meaning, how we read the Bible all its worth. A free online edition is available at www.bookofconcord.org and published editions from both Concordia Publishing House www.cph.org and Fortress Press www.fortresspress.com .

The Word | bottom line

This understanding of God's Word—divine and human, written, proclaimed and made flesh—is not just some vague philosophy but is reflected in nearly every aspect of our life together. For example, you will see it embedded into Immanuel in the following ways:

- *Scriptures upheld as the ultimate authority for our private and corporate life*
- *Scriptures taught to all ages and stages of life*
- *People gathering around, talking about and studying God's Word*
- *Corporate confession of faith in harmony with the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord 1580A.D.*
- *Corporate confession of sin and the proclamation of forgiveness*
- *Regular celebration of Lord's Supper and Baptism*
- *Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the object of all worship and devotion*

Addendum | extra info

How did I get my Bible?

Your personal Bible is actually the product of an incredible and trustworthy process—one that began with God Himself. Put into steps it would look like this:

Step #1: Revelation / inspiration.

This is the miraculous event whereby God reveals Himself and His Truth to someone and inspires them through the power of the Holy Spirit to write down what He has to say in the original manuscripts.

Step #2: Transmission.

This is the process by which the original manuscripts were carefully copied by trained scribes so that other copies could be made available for people to read.

Step #3: Translation.

The original manuscripts and the subsequent copies were penned in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Thus, in order for people of other languages to access them, translation must take place. So, teams of scholars skilled in 'hermeneutics' (the art of translation) carefully undertake the painstaking process of translating the original languages into the languages of others. Today, the Bible has been carefully translated into nearly 3000 languages.

Step #4: Publication.

For many years the Scriptures were available to the educated elite and in Latin. That all changed when the Gutenberg moveable type printing press made it possible to mass-produce texts. Martin Luther translated the Bible into German in 1522. This together with the printing technology of the day made the Bible widely available in everyday language for the first time in church history. Today the Bible is the best-selling book of all time.

Which translation is best?

It can be tough when trying to choose a Bible that is best for you. In general, most Bible translations lean in one of two directions: literal accuracy or readability.

Translations that lean toward accuracy are most concerned with achieving a literal, word for word translation. While these translations are very true to the manuscripts they can at times be more difficult in terms of readability.

Those that lean toward readability are most concerned with allowing the words to flow smoothly for the reader and to reflect the current vernacular. The downside of these translations is that they take some liberty in interpretation, seeking equivalent ideas rather than literal translation.

The New American Standard (NASB) is a very accurate, word-for-word translation. The popular New International Version (NIV) is a good middle ground leaning toward readability. "The Message" and the "Living Bible," however, paraphrase Scripture and pay less attention to word meanings, seeking to focus almost solely on readability. These should not be used for in-depth study.

Immanuel embraces the English Standard Version (ESV). Devoted to accuracy and word for word translation, the ESV also demonstrates a beautiful readability without compromising its allegiance to the available manuscript evidence. Immanuel recommends "The Lutheran Study Bible" as it includes notes produced by a collaboration of hundreds of Lutheran Christians reading the Scriptures and so is helpful in clarifying how we as a community read the Bible for meaning. Available from www.cph.org or www.amazon.com.

We highly encourage our members to have a good, word for word translation to use for study. The ESV, NASB, and NIV are available in “study” forms providing notes, helps, and room to jot down your own thoughts. *While a good Bible can be expensive, it is an essential investment.*

How should I begin reading the Bible?

First, get yourself a great study Bible—preferably The Lutheran Study Bible. You can get a free paperback ESV at Immanuel.

Second, get a simple reading plan that tackles just a few, select books at a time. We suggest the following, easy to remember reading plan:

Go to L.A.

- Luke (A historical narrative of the life of Jesus)
- Acts (The life of the 1st Century Church)

Get your G.E.D.

- Genesis (Creation and the Fathers of the faith—Abraham, Noah)
- Exodus (Red Sea; 10 Commandments)
- Daniel (Lion’s Den and some prophecy)

Yes S.I.R.E!

- Samuel (Life of King David)
- Isaiah (OT prophecy, fulfilled in Christ)
- Ruth (Family, marriage)
- Ephesians (Christian community)

Practice C.P.R.

- Colossians (Holy living)
- Philippians (Faith encouragement)
- Revelation (The life of Jesus from his ascension to his return in glory)

Talk to J.R.

- John (The life of Jesus for those who’ve already read Matthew, Mark and Luke)
- Romans (An advanced articulation of Christian doctrine)

Believe the Bible?³

In their earlier conversations, many false philosophical opinions had been raised, and so Socrates says to Phaedo: *"It would be easily understandable if someone became so annoyed at all these false notions that for the rest of his life he despised and mocked all talk about being - but in this way he would be deprived of the truth of existence and would suffer a great loss"* (As quoted by Pope Benedict XVI in his Sept 20, 2006 speech at University of Regensburg).

Pope Benedict was talking about what he sees as the ongoing assault on reason in matters of faith. His comments were in relation to the effects of "radical" Islam in our world. This quote is also relevant to our discussion of the Bible. It is relevant for pointing out a host of false notions that lead people to despise and mock all talk of Jesus, Christianity and the Bible. Our task is to show people their great loss by cutting through all the false notions to move closer to the truth.

We must first admit that the Bible (as we have it today) came into existence over time; there was a process and men were involved. The Bible did not simply fall out of heaven into human hands. Then the discussion must move on to ask what criteria the Christian community used to determine what was/was not the authoritative, authentic and historically definitive Word of God. On what authority did the Church accept individual letters? Why did the community formally "canonize" (declare as sacred) particular texts? What was the nature of the argument surrounding the disputed texts? What story do the excluded sources tell in comparison to the Old Testament and the witness of the first Apostles?

Essentially, the criteria for selection were:

1. Was the text written by an eyewitness or under the direction of one of the first apostles?
2. Is the message of the text in harmony with the testimony of the apostolic witness?
3. Has the text been used by the range of Christian communities located throughout the world?
4. Do the confessions, beliefs, and actions of those who have embraced this text match those who have embraced other accepted texts?

The texts of the Bible arose within a believing community and were intended for use by the believing community. In many ways, the Scriptures were self-authenticating. Those texts that readily met the criteria became widely embraced by Christian communities while others fell away. By the late 2nd century the books of the New Testament were essentially settled and embraced by the majority of Christians. It was at the Council of Nicaea in 325 that this agreed upon 'canon' was publicly affirmed by the church.⁴

Authority?

The resurrected Jesus sent the apostles into the world saying, *"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you"* (Jn 20.21). The authority of Christ rests entirely in his resurrection, *"Because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead"* (Acts 17.30-31). Just as the Father sent Jesus into the world by the Holy Spirit to speak on his behalf, *"[Jesus said]... the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me"* (Jn 14.24b), so the apostles, by the same Holy Spirit, speak on behalf of Christ (by His authority), the one who was dead but is now alive forevermore. Their word is Christ's word. A word of forgiveness; where there is forgiveness, there is life and salvation. It is the Word of God because Christ is risen. The Word of God has Christ as its content, it proclaims Christ crucified and raised from the dead for the forgiveness of sins.

The apostles testify to how Jesus Christ has fulfilled the Old Testament promises *"For all the promises of God find their Yes in him"* (2Cor 1.20a). In the early church, the Scriptures were the Old Testament. The concept of a New Testament had to develop over time. As this concept developed, it was rooted in the Old Testament account of God's words and deeds in history. The apostolic confession concerning what God said and did through the person and work of Jesus Christ, especially raising him from the dead, became the New Testament.

³ Unpublished essay by Rev. Kevin Fenster, revised Epiphany 2012.

⁴ For analysis of the canon, see *The Canon Debate*, by Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders, Eds.

Authenticity?

Determination of the canon was not a concern of the early Christians yet certain traditions both oral and written came to have universally recognized status through wide circulation, use and readily affirmable agreement with the Old Testament and the witness of those who were closest to Jesus, namely the apostles. The four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John circulated together as a discreet collection. The thirteen letters of Paul also circulated widely in a single discreet collection. These collections, universally recognized as definitive accounts of the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, Savior of the world promised of old through the Old Testament prophets, were never in dispute. The letters of Paul and the four Gospels were already functioning as the authentic, authoritative and historically definitive Word of God in and for the entire Christian community by the end of the 1st century, long before the time of Constantine the Great (272-337AD). These texts were already definitive before the Church, in reaction to the rise of new alternative accounts, formalized as canon what we now call the New Testament. The OT canon was established by around 180BC.⁵

What was the nature of the argument surrounding the disputed texts? The honestly disputed texts were weak on one or more but not all criteria for acceptance. These texts like James, Hebrews, II Peter, II & III John, Jude and Revelation were not unanimously accepted. In the Lutheran tradition we don't look to these texts alone for definitive doctrine rather we interpret these texts in light of the four Gospels and the Pauline Epistles.

Historicity?

Though his own works are largely lost, Church fathers quote St. Papias (the Bishop of Hierapolis, which is close to Laodicea and Colossae, ca. 65-140AD) called by Irenaeus a hearer of John and companion of Polycarp. St. Papias records significant details regarding the transmission of the words and deeds of Jesus. The Apostle Philip died in Hierapolis and Papias knew his daughters who lived there.

St. Irenaeus (ca. 115-202 AD) on the origins of the Gospels: "*Luke, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him... Mark the disciple and interpreter of Peter did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter*" (Against the Heretics III. 1.1).

Eusebius of Caesarea (ca A.D. 260-341) quotes Papias "*Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter...*" (Ecclesiastical History III 39.15).

It is helpful to remember that we "enlightened" 21st Century thinkers are not the first to doubt the testimony concerning Jesus. We are not the first to raise questions. We are not the first to seek the Truth. Eusebius of Caesarea (Ecclesiastical History III, xxix):

"I will not hesitate to add also for you to my interpretations what I formerly learned with care from the Presbyters [leaders of local congregations/pastors] and have carefully stored in memory, giving assurance of its truth. For I did not take pleasure as the many do in those who speak much, but in those who teach what is true, nor in those who relate foreign precepts, but in those who relate the precepts which were given by the Lord to the faith and came down from the Truth itself. And also if any follower of the Presbyters happened to come, I would inquire for the sayings of the Presbyters, what Andrew said, or what Peter said, or what Philip or what Thomas or James or what John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples, and for the things which other of the Lord's disciples, and for the things which Aristion and the Presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, were saying. For I considered that I should not get so much advantage from matter in books as from the voice which yet lives and remains."

⁵ For analysis of the Old Testament canon, see *The Oracles of God: The Old Testament Canon*, by Andrew E. Steinmann.

Conclusion

The postmodern⁶ rejection of meta-narrative and the assumption that truth is relative common in recent decades has reinforced the importance of St. Anselm's assertion that we believe in order to understand. Faith is good for the mind; faith stimulates the mind to look behind the appearances. That we believe in order to understand is not merely good for the individual, but good for the culture. The reasons are many, but central among them is that questions of faith lead directly to the big questions: Does God exist? Is the soul immortal? Is the universe eternal? Training in these questions leads to free and able minds, minds not bound by today's superstitions of political correctness or the tyranny of diversity.

The most effective response to attempts to discredit the believability of the Bible is not to engage in a defensive way, but beginning in the Old Testament with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and the prophets, to tell God's story of salvation through Jesus Christ who by his resurrection validates everything spoken of him in the Bible. Then fill in the details of the history of the particular texts that make the Bible the Bible. In the end, only through the Spirit filled eyes of faith can we fully recognize the Bible as the Word of God. Only through an informed faith can we read the texts for all they're worth and only then can we believe the Bible.

⁶ postmodernism generally asserts that all truth is relative to the individual in context (truth is determined by the individual in community) and that there is no meta-narrative, no one big story that describes reality for everyone all the time.

God | week three

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)

How do we know God? ⁷

The presupposition of all theistic⁸ religion is the belief that God not only exists but can be known. While all religions differ as to the details of just how one comes to know God, most assert that humanity has to search, discover, or work its way towards Him.

Some assert that **moralism** is the way to God; that through perfection of conduct, one can earn God's favor and achieve personal peace.

Others claim that **speculation** is the way to God. If one only knew the truth, if one could only discover the knowledge key to understanding the complexities of life, the mysteries of the universe, then one would know both God and peace.

Still others hold that **mysticism** is the way to God. Through ecstatic and emotional personal experiences, one can become one with God, transcending ordinary life to connect with the divine, ascending to higher spiritual realities. There is a fine line between becoming one with God and becoming god oneself.

Moralism, speculation and mysticism are all rooted in the very first sin of humanity—the desire to be like God: perfect, all knowing and beyond creation. (Gen. 3:5; Rom. 3:12)

Christianity however is distinctly different from those. While we believe the human mind to be far too limited to comprehend the fullness of God (Rom. 11:33-34), we hold that God in His mercy has made Himself known to us. Rather than us climbing our way up to God, God has come down to us in the person of Jesus. God has come near to us and revealed His existence to all of creation.

Revealed in general

God has left hints or traces of his existence throughout his creation. While none of these hints offers a complete view of God—no more than a footprint tells us all we would like to know about the animal that left it—they do tell us in arguably notable terms that God exists (the foot print is not imaginary).

Professor Robert Kolb points out that God has left traces of His existence in at least five places: nature, history, conscience, reason and emotion.⁹ For example, through nature—with its beauty, complexity and ability to provide for our needs—one may see the world is the product of a purposeful designer or creator behind it all. (Rom. 1:20; Acts 14:17). Over the course of history, we see time and again that good ultimately triumphs over evil, thus revealing God's reign over all and his will for the good of all creation. (2Peter 3:9)

Likewise, human conscience reflects the existence of God. Embedded within humanity there is a sense of right and wrong (golden rule) which points to a "law-giver" who established certain natural boundaries within the heart of humanity. The apostle Paul points this out when he argues that gentiles, who knew nothing of God or Moses' law, still lived in many ways according to His basic moral code. (Rom. 2:14)

Also reason or basic human logic, asserts the existence of—as Aristotle said—an "unmoved mover" who, at the very least, set all things in motion. Others have argued that reason

⁷ Parts adapted from G.E. Veith's *The Spirituality of the Cross*, p. 25-33.

⁸ Theistic religion refers to any religion that has a deity/god.

⁹ Robert Kolb, *The Christian Faith*, Concordia 1993, pp. 30-37.

leads people to believe in the existence of something that is “greater than all things.” By definition, this would be God.

Emotionally we experience life personally. We love, we hate, we laugh, we mourn, we connect personally to other people, to all creation. We have personality; we recognize personality in creation and we “feel” emotionally, deeply. Each of us is unique and yet so much the same. We are not impersonal beings; others affect us personally. The universe is more than merely impersonal matter, space and time. We “feel” the presence of something or someone more. God gives this general revelation to all of humanity.

Revealed in detail

While nature and reason can reveal the existence of God generally, there is just one place where He has made Himself known specifically: His Word. It is in the Word of God—written in Scripture, spoken by His people, and made flesh in Jesus—where we learn about God personally, in detail. God’s Word is where, among many other things, we learn about God’s character, about His love for us, and about our need for the forgiveness, reconciliation and eternal salvation Jesus gives freely.

This specific revelation is given to God’s people (that’s us) and it is we who are charged with sharing, personally, the details of God, His love in Jesus.

How many Gods are there?

Therefore you are great, O LORD God. For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears.—2 Sam 7:22 (ESV)

The Bible reveals that there is only one, true God. (Ps. 96:5; Isa. 44:6) All other “gods” are false and not truly gods at all but idols. There are as many idols as the imagination can conceive (1 Cor. 8:4-5).

16th century pastor Martin Luther said the first commandment (You shall have no other gods), means whatever we fear, love and trust above all things, is our god. Some people depend on their own reason or intuition, rationality or emotionality. Some trust other people, family, community, ideology, vocational identity and even, yes, “faith” or “religion.” In other words, everyone has a god. It’s a question of what/who is your god?

We all fear, love and trust something as our ultimate source of identity, security and meaning. That one thing is our “god.” While humankind may have many gods, the Scriptures assert there is only one, true God (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20-21).

What is God like?

Having revealed Himself to us in His Word and having left glimpses of Himself throughout His creation we now know enough about God to point out certain characteristics and attributes that belong to Him. After all, we believe that God is not just some fabrication of the imagination, philosophical idea or indefinable energy, but a living and active person.

Just as with you and me, there are many ways to describe God. Some are traits that he shares with us in some small way (shared attributes) while others belong solely to Him (unshared attributes). A few of the most important ones are listed below. Take a look.

- Personal—God speaks of Himself in personal terms. We also know that He is a living, active, rational being who speaks, works, and relates with His world. (Isa. 46:10-11; Jer. 10:10; Rom. 11:33)
- Omnipresent—God is everywhere at all times (He can be where and when he wants or not). (Ps. 139:7-12; Col. 1:17)
- Omniscient—God has complete and perfect knowledge of all things; past, present, and future; actual or potential. God can know what He wants to know and He cannot know what He does not want to know (He can forgive and forget our sins). (1 Sam. 2:3; Ps. 139:1-4; Prov. 15:3; 1 John 3:20)

- Omnipotent—God has the power to do and will whatever He wants. God is free absolutely to do and/or not do what He wants. God alone is perfectly free. (Ps. 33:9, 115:3; Luke 1:37; Eph. 3:20)
- Sovereign—God has supreme rule and authority over all things. He can do what He wills where and when he will and still be good, still be God. (Ps. 103:19; 2 Sam. 7:28; Rom. 9:13-14)

The Father is God | creator

I believe in God the Almighty Father, Creator of Heaven and Earth.
— 1st Article Apostles' Creed

The Scriptures speak plainly that the Father is God. To Him is ascribed the role of Creator and Sustainer of all things who sent His Son, Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.

God created us together with all creatures and He gave to us body and soul, all possessions and all our talents. As a loving Father he also provides everything we need to survive, as well as protects us against all danger and evil. He does all this because of His pure, fatherly and divine goodness and His mercy, not because we've earned it or deserved it. (Gen. 1:1; 1 Cor. 8:6; 2 Cor. 1:3-4; Eph. 1:3-4; 1 Peter 1:3)

The Son is God | redeemer

And [I believe] in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried, descended to Hell, on the third day rose again from the dead, ascended to Heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Almighty Father. From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.— 2nd Article Apostles' Creed

Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say the Son of Man is?" (Matt. 16:13) Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matt. 16:16). Jesus had the appearance of a human being but the characteristics of God: Jesus received worship (Jn. 9:35-41). Jesus forgave sins (Mk. 2:5-11). Jesus claimed to be from eternity (Jn. 8:58). Not only that, but Jesus power over death exhibited in His resurrection proves Him to be true and trustworthy in all He says—even His claims to be God (Matt. 28:9; John 1:1-4, 1:14, 5:17-18, 8:58, 10:30-33, 12:37-41 cf. Isa. 6:9-11; 20:28-29; Acts 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Col. 1:16-17, 2:8-9; Phil. 2:10-11; Heb. 1:8; 1 Co. 8:4-6; 1 Tim. 6:15; Titus 2:13; 1 John 5:20; Rev. 1:8, 1:17-18, 17:14, 19:16, 22:13-16).

We confess therefore that Jesus is truly God, born of the Father in eternity (not created) and also truly man, born of the Virgin Mary. He has redeemed us, lost and condemned people, bought and won us from all sins, death and the authority of the Devil through His substitutionary death on the cross.

The Holy Spirit is God | sanctifier (to re-create holy, pure)

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and an everlasting life. Amen.—
Apostle's Creed; 3rd Article

The Holy Spirit is clearly called God throughout the Scriptures. In the Old Testament He is all-powerful (Micah 3:8; Acts 1:8; Rom. 15:13, 19), eternal (Heb. 9:14) all knowing (Isa. 40:13-14; 1 Cor. 2:10), creator (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30) and all present (Ps. 139:7). In the New Testament, He is also clearly declared God (Acts 5:3-4; John 14:16; 2 Cor. 3:16-18). The Holy Spirit is a person who can be resisted (Acts 7:51), grieved (Eph. 4:30), insulted (Heb. 10:29) and quenched (1Thes. 5:16).

We believe that we cannot come to faith in Jesus Christ by our own intelligence or power. The Holy Spirit that calls us through the Gospel, opens our eyes, changes (sanctifies) us and keeps us in the faith. God's Spirit resides within all believers, thus making us, as Scripture says, the temples of God (1 Cor. 3:16).

What about the Trinity?

It is true, do a word search in your Bible and you will not find the word "trinity" on any of its pages. Tertullian, a church father, did not coin the word until the late second century. However, the concept is present throughout Scripture.

That God is the Triune God does not mean that there are three Gods, or that God is three beings united in one purpose (for God clearly and incessantly refers to Himself as being "one"; i.e. Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29-32) or that God simply makes Himself appear in three different modes. To confess that God exists as a Trinity is to confess that there is one God, unified in His essence, who exists eternally as three equal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A unity of substance—a plurality of persons. Our understanding of the Trinity is by Faith.

Here the analogy of "family" seems to work as well as any. Within one family, there are multiple persons with distinct roles/characteristics. Yet each person is equally "family." However, all such analogies ultimately fail with respect to the Trinity. The best way to wrap our minds around the reality of The Trinity is to recognize the distinction (not a separation into separate things) between God as He is in His essence, that is (the "stuff" God is made of), and God as He acts in our past, present and future. It is in the economy of The Trinity, God's actions (the "stuff" God does), that we can see The Trinity most clearly. God the Father speaks and acts through the Son by the Holy Spirit. These three testify to who God is by revealing His divine activity. God's actions are tangible for us to witness. (Genesis 1:1-2; Matthew 27:46-49, 28:19; Mark 1:9-11).

God's essence, the "stuff" He is made of, is beyond our comprehension. Remember, God is God – I am not! Only God truly understands God! When we try to comprehend how $1+1+1=1$, our reason will inevitably try to create analogies ($1 \times 1 \times 1=1$) that break down into actual error as we try to make God conform to our image (rather than God conforming us to His). Better to remain focused on how God reveals himself by what He does: The Triune God creates, redeems and sanctifies (makes holy).

God | bottom line

This understanding of God is not just an idea but is reflected in nearly every aspect of our life together. For example, you will see it embedded into Immanuel in the following ways:

- *Presupposition that everything begins and ends with God who speaks to us.*
- *Proclamation of Jesus Christ as the sole source of reconciliation with God.*
- *Corporate confession of the Apostles' and the other ecumenical (universal) creeds*
- *Lively trust in the Spirit's active, personal presence in our lives.*
- *Preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace among a diverse plurality of persons and families.*
- *A community commitment to baptismal life, daily dying to the old life and rising to new life.*

Homework | fifteen minute intensive

For next time, please complete the following activities. They are designed to help you reflect on what we've discussed. Come ready to ask questions and defend your insights.

1. During World War II, Father William Thomas Cummings claimed that "there are no atheists in foxholes." His point was that when life gets tough everyone grasps for, or calls out to something or someone for help.

What are some of the common things—other than the one, true God—that people in our culture hold on to for security, meaning, and a sense of purpose?

2. Today we learned some important attributes about God. In particular, we learned that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. Why might these attributes be considered a fearful thing for some and a joyful, comforting thing for others?

3. Take a look at Psalm 14:1-3 and Romans 3:12. What kind of a picture do these verses paint of humanity's ability to know God and to follow His commands? Positive or Negative? Next, look up 1 John 4:9-10. What is the Father's answer to this messed up state?

Addendum | extra info

The Apostles' Creed

The Apostles' Creed dates back to the earliest days of Christianity and developed out of the early Christian communities as they sought to summarize the key tenets of the historic Christian faith. The Creed grew independently amongst the early Christians and was circulated in various forms until it was officially recognized between the 6th and 8th centuries.

The Apostles' Creed (along with the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds) has long been a key part of Christian faith and identity in expressing our faith in the one, true, and Triune God and in combating common heresies or false understandings that have emerged throughout the centuries.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,

and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

On the third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,

from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the Holy Christian Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting.

Amen.

The Apostle's Creed | Luther's Catechism explanation

In 1529, the noted reformer, Martin Luther, published his Small Catechism (basic teaching). He designed it to equip parents to teach the basic tenets of the Christian faith to their families. He organized this Catechism in six chief parts:

1. **The Ten Commandments.** Where we learn to see what the new creation (the image of God restored) looks like.
2. **The Apostles' Creed.** Where we learn to confess our faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. **The Lord's Prayer.** Where we learn to enter into personal conversation with God.
4. **The Sacrament of Holy Baptism.** Where we learn about how God drowns the sin that separates us, adopts us as His beloved children, making us heirs of eternal life.
5. **Confession.** Where we learn how to confess our sins and receive absolution, that is, the entire forgiveness of all our sins from God Himself.
6. **The Sacrament of the Altar.** Where we learn about how Christ gives us His own precious body and blood in, with and under bread and wine to give us the forgiveness of sins he won for us on the Cross.

At Immanuel, we have found this to be a simple, yet effective tool for all ages in understanding key parts of the faith. Here we include Luther's explanation of the Creed.

I. The First Article: On Creation

I believe in God the Almighty Father, Creator of Heaven and Earth.

Q. *What does this mean?*

A. *I believe that God created me, together with all that exists. He gave to me: body and soul, eyes, ears and all the other parts of my body, my mind and all my senses and preserves them as well. He gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and land, wife and children, fields, animals and all I own. Every day He abundantly provides everything I need to nourish this body and life. He protects me against all danger, shields and defends me from all evil. He does all this because of His pure, fatherly and divine goodness and His mercy, not because I've earned it or deserved it. For all of this, I must thank Him, praise Him, serve Him and obey Him. Yes, this is true!*

II. The Second Article: On Redemption

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried, descended to Hell, on the third day rose again from the dead, ascended to Heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Almighty Father. From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.

Q. *What does this mean?*

A. *I believe that Jesus Christ is truly God, born of the Father in eternity and also truly man, born of the Virgin Mary. He is my Lord! He redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, bought and won me from all sins, death and the authority of the Devil. It did not cost Him gold or silver, but His holy, precious blood, His innocent body -- His death! Because of this, I am His very own, will live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him righteously, innocently and blessedly forever, just as He is risen from death, lives and reigns forever. Yes, this is true.*

III. The Third Article: On Becoming Holy

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and an everlasting life. Amen.

Q. *What does this mean?*

A. *I believe that I cannot come to my Lord Jesus Christ by my own intelligence or power. But the Holy Spirit call me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as He calls, gathers together, enlightens and makes holy the whole Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus in the one, true faith. In this Church, He generously forgives each day every sin committed by me and by every believer. On the last day, He will raise me and all the dead from the grave. He will give eternal life to me and to all who believe in Christ. Yes, this is true!*

What about creation and evolution?

Among faithful, Bible-believing Christians there are different interpretations of the creation account in Genesis 1–2. Some people read Genesis 1-2 and believe the text to say definitively how, what and when creation happened. Others read Genesis and believe the text foremost tells us *that* creation happened and *why* it happened. Creation happened because in the beginning, God created. The first article of the Creed, says, “I believe in God the Father, Almighty Creator of heaven and earth.” Through the long history of the church, that is the only statement of faith regarding creation required of those baptized into Christ. At Immanuel, we ask no more, no less.

In the early church, there were those who like St. Basil the Great (~329-379AD) read Genesis and rejected allegorical interpretations. He argued for a literal six 24-hour days of creation. There were those who, like St. Augustine (354-386AD), read Genesis and understood it to describe an instantaneous act wherein everything was created at once, which God then organized over the course of days (not literal days but logical markers). There are those who, like Origen (185-254AD), read Genesis and did not understand it literally at all.

At Immanuel, we take our connection to the universal, apostolic, Christian Church seriously. We recognize there have always been differing readings of our texts while maintaining the essential unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We do not wish to become distracted by the controversies of our time regarding Creation and Evolution. Each one of us is bound to the first article and free to wrestle under God’s Word for faithful understanding of Creation.

What about the Theory of Evolution? We can and do observe evolution occurring in nature. We believe evolution happens; but are free to question its power to account for the origin, existence and diversity of all life. Does the theory of evolution alone necessarily deny, exclude, and/or disprove the existence God? The answer is no. Is evolution responsible for the existence of the earth and all life on earth? Some may disagree, but we say no. Evolution is not our answer for everything. God is our answer for everything (not merely in the “gaps”).

We would like to stress that Christian brothers and sisters who hold disparate views concerning how we read the Bible regarding Creation and Evolution are welcome in our life together as a church. Our only request is that no one becomes divisive over this matter, seeking to make one view the litmus test for authentic Christianity. As Paul says, we only see in part now but one day in the presence of Jesus, we will know in full (1Cor. 13:12) and we will all be in complete agreement on this and other questions that easily divide us today.

What about homosexuality and transgenderism?

Recently, American society has experienced a wide-reaching change in attitudes toward and expanded rights for homosexual and/or transgender people. We believe God calls us to accept people as they are and to do unto others as we would have others do unto us. Therefore we seek to avoid doing harm to anyone. We believe Original Sin is an empirically verifiable doctrine of our faith. Sin is a reality all human beings have in common (Romans 3:23). We place ourselves under God’s Word and let God alone be judge. Over all questions of what is/is not of sin we believe that Jesus was made to be sin for us so that all people might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Corinthians 5:21). We seek to put love first in all our relationships and to live together in society as servants of all people.

We believe God created humans male and female and that it is God’s will that human life be fulfilled in relationship with the opposite gender (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-25). Even after the fall into sin (Gen. 3), we believe that is still true. We also recognize, after the fall into sin, relationships with God, ourselves and others are complex and even prone to deadly conflict (Gen. 4). This is especially acute today as people who do not fully embrace homosexuality and transgenderism are labeled “homophobic,” “hateful,” “intolerant” and threatened with lawsuits or worse. Some in the LGBT community seek to force their views on others by allowing only their view is acceptable: homosexuality is the same as heterosexuality and transgenderism is a matter of an individual’s right to self-identification which must be

supported and protected by law. At Immanuel, we do not seek to force our views on anyone and insofar as it depends on us we seek to live at peace with all people.

We do not tolerate any words or actions which may or actually do infringe upon any person's right to life. Neither do we tolerate words or actions which may, or actually do, force people, against conscience, to embrace homosexuality and transgenderism as God's will for some people.

We are all called to a life of repentance, that is, to turning from our self-defining, self-directed life and seeking to live according to God's original definition of who we are, male and female. We seek to daily die to self and reach out through faith in hope of a new creation, the restoration of God's original creation.

What about marriage?

The marriage policy of Immanuel Lutheran Church of Sandy, OR, a member congregation of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, is and always has been consistent with the Synod's beliefs on marriage. We believe that marriage is a sacred union of one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24-25), and that God gave marriage as a picture of the relationship between Christ and His bride the Church (Ephesians 5:32). The official position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, as set forth in 1998 Res. 3-21 ("To Affirm the Sanctity of Marriage and to Reject Same-Sex Unions"), is that homosexual unions come under categorical prohibition in the Old and New Testaments (Leviticus 18:22, 24; 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:9-10) as contrary to the Creator's design (Romans 1:26-27). These positions and beliefs can be found on the LCMS website, along with other statements, papers and reports on the subject of homosexuality and same-sex civil unions and "marriage." Our pastors will not officiate over any marriages inconsistent with these beliefs, and our church property may not be used for any marriage ceremony, reception or other activity that would be inconsistent with our beliefs and this policy.

<http://www.lcms.org/socialissues/sexuality>

<http://www.lcms.org/socialissues/marriage>

We at Immanuel hold a high view of marriage. Marriage is a foundational building block of human community and is intended by God to find its fullest expression and ultimate fulfillment as part of the Body of Christ. Immanuel is not a wedding chapel. Pastor Kevin will solemnize marriage vows only for couples who complete his prescribed course of premarital discovery and are currently or fully intend to live their married life in the community of faith at Immanuel.

What about divorce?

Divorce is not part of God's original intent for humanity as Jesus teaches in Mark 10:1-12. This side of the fall, however, divorce happens and so Moses provided some direction to manage the damage caused (Deut 24:1-4). At times divorce can be an act of compassion between two people and for the extended circle of relationships that naturally occurs through marriage. God's forgiveness in Christ covers all our sins and so we extend his love to people of divorce and offer encouragement and hope for future fulfillment in marriage. We do not settle for the post-fall reality rather God's original intent in creation is the standard we aspire to by his active grace in our lives.

Sin & Grace | week four

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. —Romans 3:23 (ESV)

Is there something wrong?

Original Sin is an empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith. Few, if any, will argue this statement: The world is not a perfect place. And while each person's assessment of just how "bad" things are undoubtedly varies, there is broad agreement that something is not right. A quick read of the news reminds us that the world is constantly struggling with disharmony, disaster, suffering, injustice, loneliness, depression, uncertainty and of course: death.

But perhaps the most troubling truth is that the problems of this world are not only *outside* of us, they also exist *within* us. When I am honest with myself, I can admit freely that I deal with many of the sad things I read about in the paper (injustice, suffering, uncertainty). I also fail to meet my own personal standards for morality, the standards of my family, my community, my world and especially of God.

Across the street from Immanuel is the Sandy Police Station. It is a constant reminder that things are not right. What is wrong with human beings that we need police with body armor and guns patrolling our neighborhood streets? Why do we need pepper spray, tazers, handcuffs and jail cells? Why do we need law at all?

The whole of creation is out of sync with how things "should" be. There is evil outside. There is evil within. This universal reality is what the Bible calls "Sin."

Sin | its entrance

...sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...—Romans 5:12 (ESV)

Scripture tells us that God created a perfect, sinless world and that upon creating man and woman He looked at all of it and said it was "very good." (Gen. 1:21) The first man and woman—Adam and Eve—enjoyed not just a perfect world around them but a perfect relationship between them and a perfect relationship with God. Everything existed in perfect harmony.

The tree and its fruit were a sign of the distinction between Creator and creature. By not eating the fruit, in obedience to God's command, human kind was to respect that distinction (God is God – I am not God). Not eating was an act of worship. The tree a place of prayer, praise and giving thanks for God's gift of life.

God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil or they would die (Gen. 2:16-17). Deceived by the serpent, who led them to distrust the Word of God, Adam and Eve acted in direct disobedience of God's command. Man and woman sinned against the Creator. They abandoned their dependence on God. They asserted their independence from God. They disrespected the distinction by seeking to be more than creatures.

This original sin, also known as the Fall of Man, marks the moment when humankind entered into a state of rebellion against God and His Word, and creation itself moved from a state of harmony to a state of disharmony, from peace and security to chaos and uncertainty. This state, or condition is original sin.

To this very day, all of sin finds its root in this first act of disobedience. Original sin is, at its root, a distrust of the pattern of life set by God and a desire to be our own law-giver, our own god. We are fiercely committed to self-rule. All sin, like the first, is grounded in a desire to love, trust, and obey someone or something other than God; namely, ourselves.

Sin | its effects

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. —Psalm 51:5 (ESV)

Original sin

Scripture teaches us that because of “The Fall,” all human beings—from Adam on down the line—have inherited Adam’s disobedience and distrust of God. (Romans 5:12) Even though we were not there, we too are infected with his sin from the very moment of our conception and are thus born in a state of broken relationship with our Creator, active rebellion against Him and His Word. This sad but true attribute of human existence is what Christians call “original sin.” Original sin means that there is for all of humankind both a *hereditary guilt* and a *hereditary corruption* that flow from our father Adam.

Even in the most innocent of human creatures, young children, original sin makes itself visible: in their sense of omnipotence, which demands and expects that all else serve them; in their low threshold for patience and tolerance; in their demand for immediate satisfaction. Finally, their physical mortality reveals the truth that they too carry the curse of sin. (Gen. 2:17; 3:19) Babies die, and death, Scripture tells us, is the wages of sin¹⁰ (Romans 6:23).

Punishment of sin

The punishment for Adam and Eve’s disobedience was three-fold: they were separated from God (Gen. 3:24), they were condemned to physical death (Gen. 3:19), and they were completely corrupted by sin (spiritual death). And since we carry Adam’s and Eve’s sin as our own we enter the world bearing the same punishments right from the start.

Death and the decay of life are for all people inescapable elephants in the room that all must face. Likewise, we’re each born cut off from God and outside of His family. Sin is embedded into the very nature of who we are. We cannot help but fall short of God’s holy standards (Eph. 2:1-3). We cannot re-harmonize ourselves with God’s will for our lives.

We are born impotent, absolutely completely cut off from God, destined for death and unable to do anything about it. We are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves.

What kinds of sins are there?

There are mistakes we make which are merely mistakes. Not everything is a sin. It is not necessarily of sin when I spill my glass of milk on the dinner table. It is of sin if I spill milk in your face or leave the milk spilled for someone else to clean up!

Sin in the narrow sense

There are actual sins that you and I commit on a regular basis; things that we do or do not do, speak, think, feel or will that are contrary to God’s Word and God’s Natural Law.

Of such sins, there are two kinds: sins of commission and sins of omission. A sin of commission is something we do even though we know better (e.g. stealing). A sin of omission is when we fail to do something we know should have done (e.g. love our neighbor).

However, such distinctions mean little, as Scripture is clear that all sins, committed, omitted, intentional or accidental, in us or outside of us, all offensive to God (Rom. 14:23) and damnable even though they may have more or less impact on those around us.

¹⁰ *Adapted from “The Christian Faith” by Robert Kolb, p. 91.*

Sin in the broad sense

There is original sin, which gives rise to all actual sins. Sin is the inborn condition of human nature which has infected all of creation (Romans 8:20-22) causing all disharmony, disaster, disease and death of every kind. We are captive to Sin in the broad sense and therefore we cannot live perfectly without committing/omitting actual sins personally.

Sin in the broad sense is often lost in the sea of actual sins. We have no control over original sin but we think we might have control over actual sins. This gives rise to all manner of moral legalism on the one hand and moral relativism (anti-legalism) on the other. For the legalist, it seems everything is an actual sin but no matter how much law we try to live by we never stop sinning, actually. For the relativist, "if it feels good do it" is justified by "as long as I'm not hurting anyone else" (as if that is actually possible) and yet actual sins do their damage. Either way, the Police will always have work to do!

What is salvation?

Salvation is the act of being rescued from the wrath of God (eternal separation) that we rightly deserve because of our sinfulness (Rom. 5:9-10).

This salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone; His death on the cross and resurrection from death. There is no salvation apart from Him (John 1:29, 3:17-18, 4:42, 5:19-23; Acts 4:12; Titus 1:15; 1 John 2:2; Rev. 5:9).

Scripture teaches that Jesus lived the life of perfect holiness and righteousness that we cannot live and then willingly died the death that we deserve for our sinful disobedience. In other words, Jesus has lived our life and died our death; and in doing so has won for us forgiveness, eternal life and a "right" relationship with the Father (2 Cor. 5:18-21).

Two common ways of understanding the work of Jesus are as "substitutionary atonement" and "redemption."

Substitutionary atonement establishes the fact that in His death Jesus laid down his life as a substitute sacrifice for the sins of humankind. Sin requires a death as payment; Jesus sacrificially dies in our place, bearing the weight of God's wrath and winning for us forgiveness of sin (Rom. 5:6-8; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 2:2, 4:10). That atonement is sufficient once-for-all. There is no more atonement to be made. In Christ, sinners' sins are atoned, the slate is clean, we are made perfect, once and for all.

Redemption is a metaphor connected to the concept of slavery. We are born as slaves to sin, death and the devil; they own us. (John 8:34; Rom. 6:6) Through His innocent death, Jesus paid the debt for the sins of all humanity. Humankind is bound freely to a new "master" who through faith offers us forgiveness and life, eternal victory over sin, death and the Devil (Ps. 110:1; Rom. 6:19-23; 1 Cor. 15:21-28; Eph. 1:20-23, 2:16; Col. 1:20-21, 2:13-15). Redemption is complete. In Christ, slaves to sin are free once and for all.

The work of Jesus on the cross was not limited to those who would eventually believe but was enough to pay for the sins of all people. (John 1:29; Titus 2:11; 1 John 2:2) Sadly, however, not all receive this gift. In the mystery of God's will, He allows His substitutionary atonement, His redemption to be resisted, rejected.

Saved by grace | through faith

By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God...—Ephesians 2:8 (ESV)

So, what actually happens to a person when they “receive salvation?” That’s a great question! But in order to answer it there are a few key ideas that we need to define:

Justification: To be justified means to be in a right relationship with someone. In a legal context, it refers to the declaration, “Not guilty.” Scripture uses this term to describe the new relationship that Christians enter into with God through faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection (Rom. 3:23-25; 5:1-2). It is not that we are guilty but free to go. It means there remains no guilt. We are re-created guilt-free. All “record” of our sins is destroyed and forgotten by God. We are absolutely, perfectly righteous.

Grace: God didn’t have to save us and yet out of love He forgives us all our sins. God’s mercy (not giving what we deserve) toward us is what we call “grace” (giving what we do not deserve). In Greek the word for grace is “charis,” which simply means “gift.” Salvation is a gift given by God and in no way the product of any measure of our own work or effort (Rom. 9:16; Titus 3:5-6). It is important to be clear about this, as Grace is often misunderstood. Grace is not what God gives after we have done all we can do. We cannot earn or prove ourselves worthy of grace. No, grace is God giving us freely what we do not and cannot deserve.

Faith: Faith is a relationship of active trust in someone or something. In the context of Scripture, faith is a trust in the promises of God and the finished work of Jesus. (Heb. 11:1) *It is simultaneously a gift of God and an act of man.*¹¹

Scripture tells us that individual salvation is being **justified by grace** through **faith** on account of **Christ**. That is, we are restored to a right relationship, declared “not guilty” before God (justified) out of pure grace through a relationship of trust in and dependence on (faith) the work of Jesus that God Himself counts as yours and mine. (Rom. 3:23-25; 5:1; Phil. 3:9; Gal. 3:11; Eph. 2:1-10; Titus 3:7).

It is in that moment of justification where the salvation “happens to me” and a “joyous exchange” takes place. While Christ has taken all of my sin upon Himself at the cross, all of His righteousness and holiness is now my own. (Rom. 1:17) Just as Jesus rose from the dead to new life, so will I.

As G.E. Veith puts it, “I now have the same favor with God, the same access, the same assurance of eternal life, as Jesus does. When I stand before the Holy God, He does not turn away in judgment; rather, He sees me through the lens of Christ. Jesus has claimed all of my sins and has paid for them with His blood. He provides all of the good works I need, clothing me in His—not my—righteousness. This is what it means to be saved; and all of it happens through faith.”¹²

¹¹ See the addendum to Week Five (p.55) for further explanation of “faith.”

¹² Adapted from “*The Spirituality of the Cross*” by G.E. Veith, p. 32.

How do I receive saving faith?

...this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.—Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

Simply put, even our faith is a gift of God. It's tempting to put the responsibility back on us and to talk about choosing Jesus or making a decision for salvation. Yet Scripture tells us time and time again that salvation is not a work of our own but an act of God. It is not about us reaching up to Him but about Him reaching down to us. At Immanuel, no one is ever asked to "make a decision for" or to otherwise "choose" Jesus rather we are all invited to rejoice in the choice Jesus made for us all and to trust in His decision to save us.

So, how does God reach down to us and give us saving faith? By the *means of grace*. Grace working through faith connects us to Jesus. The Holy Spirit creates and elicits faith in us through the Word and the Sacraments. Next week, we'll take a look at how through simple elements of bread, wine, water, and words God does such amazing things.

Sin & Grace | bottom line

This understanding of sin and grace is not just an idea but is reflected in nearly every aspect of our life together. For example, you will see it embedded into Immanuel in the following ways:

- *Bold teaching on the total depravity of man and the seriousness of sin*
- *Focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the free gift of grace*
- *Corporate confession of sin and the proclamation of forgiveness*
- *Regular celebration of the Lord's Supper and Baptism*
- *Life together seeking to equip and heal all who struggle with the effects of sin*

Homework | fifteen minute intensive

For next time, please complete the following activities. They are designed to help you reflect on what we've discussed. Come ready to ask questions and defend your insights.

1. Living in a fallen world, the effects of sin can be seen everywhere. What do you think is the biggest "sin" issue that our culture is currently wrestling with and why?
2. Read Ephesians 2:1-3 and take note of the words used to describe our spiritual state prior to our faith in Jesus Christ. Which two words in particular jump out at you? Do these words paint a picture of someone who is capable of saving himself in any capacity? Why / why not?
3. Read Ephesians 2:4-5; 8-10. According to this, what is the purpose behind God choosing to bring us "back to life" through faith in Jesus?
4. Some Christians have said, "Look, people come to church to feel good, not to hear about sin." How would you respond to such a comment?

Addendum | extra info

Will everyone be saved?

No. Hell is real and those who remain as enemies of God, not reconciled to Him through faith in Jesus' death and resurrection, will go there and it will be punishment (Matthew 25:14-46; Mark 9:42-48; Luke 13:22-30; 16:19-31).

As we learned earlier, Scripture tells us that Jesus' death atoned for the sins of all humanity. We learned that God would like for all to receive the benefits of salvation and that all are invited into salvation. (Dan. 12:1-2; Isa. 66:22-24; Matt. 5:22-30; 10:28; 25:46; John 3:36; Rom. 1:18-32; 2 Peter 2:4-22; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2; Matt. 28:18-20; John 3:16; Acts 16:31) Yet sadly, we also know that not everyone has a saving faith. Why is this? Why do some continue in unbelief?

We do not know. In the great mystery of His will, God allows people to resist and reject His free gift of pardon and peace. The Holy Spirit calls, gathers and enlightens. God implores us to spread His message of forgiveness to as many as we can and to leave the rest up to Him. (Matt. 28:18-20)

Is salvation possible after death?

It does not appear possible. Hebrews 9:27 says, "It is appointed for a man to die once, and then comes the judgment." Jesus also tells us that those who reject Him are bound for a permanent separation, an eternal punishment. (Matt. 25:46; Luke 16:19-31) Purgatory, reincarnation and the like are teachings that come from outside Scripture.

How should I deal with sin?

- **Confession (to acknowledge guilt) & Repentance (to turn 180°)** - Through the conviction that comes by the Holy Spirit working through the Word confess your sin to God and actively turn away from it. (John 16:7-11; Acts 3:19)
- **Faith & Forgiveness** - Trust in the promise of forgiveness found in the cross of Jesus Christ and receive God's Word of absolution spoken for you: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." (Is. 1:18) "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9 ESV)
- **Restitution & Reconciliation:** If necessary, make amends with those you have sinned against and grant grace to those who have sinned against you. (2 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 4:32)

Can a Christian become perfect?

No, Christians cannot become perfect. Scripture reveals to us that while our sins are forgiven, sin is still a part of who we are, effecting everyday life for all people until Jesus returns and removes all of the effects of sin forever (1Cor. 15:26, 54; Rev. 7:17).

While no one can become perfect according to the flesh, the Holy Spirit makes Christians perfect in Christ. The Holy Spirit daily guides us, changes us, and shapes us in holy living and a life in harmony with God's perfect will. The Spirit enables us to overcome certain sins day by day. This life-long process of being made perfect is called sanctification. It will not be finally completed until Jesus returns, but... it will be brought to completion! (Phil. 3:12-14; 1 Cor. 15; 1 John 1:8; Rev. 19:11-21)

The Sacraments | week five

...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.
—Ephesians 5:25-26 (ESV)

How do I receive saving grace?

...this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.
—Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

In the last section, we learned that God saves human beings in a very particular way: we are justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. (Eph. 2:1-11) While it is tempting to put the responsibility back on us and to talk of “making a decision” for Christ, Scripture tells us that salvation is not a work of our own but an act of God. Salvation is not about us reaching up to God but about God reaching down to us. It’s not us choosing Him. He chooses us. Most importantly, God chooses you!

So, how then does God ‘reach down’ to earth and grant this saving grace and trust in Jesus? Simple: through God’s Word and the Sacraments; also known as the ‘means of grace.’¹³

In earlier sections, we’ve discussed how God’s Word has the power to stir up and create faith in the heart of the unbeliever. (pp. 7-10) However, God’s word itself speaks of other tangible ‘means of grace’ which, by the power of God’s Word, give faith. These are the sacraments: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Earthly elements | spiritual benefit

What’s a Sacrament?

An Act or Rite:

1. Instituted (created and commanded) by God;
2. In which God Himself joins His Word of promise to the visible element;
3. And by which He offers, gives and assures the forgiveness of sins by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Strictly defined, a sacrament is a rite instituted by Jesus whereby earthly elements are used to convey the gifts He won for us on the cross. In the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper God has selected certain elements from His created world to use as instruments in saving and sustaining fallen people.

While some reject the idea of God working through earthly elements, we must remember that God consistently has shown himself to work through earthly vessels (He once used an Ark, Gen 6:14; 1Peter 3:20) to deliver His divine gifts and do His perfect will. The Word and Sacraments are no different.

Just as God has chosen to use human language to bring the message of the Gospel to mankind in His Word, He has also chosen that same Word to work with simple water (Baptism) as well as bread and wine (the Lord’s Supper) to grant a saving faith and constant assurance in the hearts of those who receive them. (1 Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3-11; 1 Cor. 11:23-26)

¹³ “Means of grace” is a theological term for specific ways God gives His grace to people.

Why does God work like this?

...he [God] saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit...— Titus 3:5 (ESV)

Why does God choose to instill saving faith through such earthly means? We can summarize an answer from Scripture in two words: love and assurance.

In a world riddled with sin, uncertainty abounds. Spirituality is no different. The inner workings of the human heart sway back and forth between devotion and disbelief. (Ps. 25:16-17) To use one's own good works or inner sense of commitment and determination as a gauge for salvation leads one only to doubt God's love and salvation all the more. When we place the emphasis on our mental capacity, our devotion or deeds our assurance of salvation becomes inherently subjective and uncertain. We find ourselves wrestling with questions like, "How do I know where I stand with God? How can I be certain that He loves me? Am I good enough? Did I really mean it when I asked Him into my heart?"

But knowing all of this God, out of pure love, gives His people assurance in the midst of such uncertainty. God centers our assurance on events that are objective, outside of us. Out of pure love and mercy, God gives us tangible, experiential and historical actions to hold on to, to remember and to return to time and again.

Through a real, historical Jesus crucified, died and risen, through a Word proclaimed and written in our language and through water, bread and wine God anchors our spirituality *outside of us* so that we might always have certainty *within us*.

Baptism

...Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...—1 Peter 3:21 (ESV)

What is Baptism?

Two parts:

1. Water
2. The Word of God

Water is just water, ordinary water. Baptism is not only water; it is water together with the Word of God (Matthew 28:18b-19; Mark 16:16a; 1 Peter 3:21). A Christian baptism involves water applied to the body of the baptized along with the Word of God, summarized in the phrase *"I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* Baptism is God's activity on earth - God the Father, through His Son comes down to earth, here with us, by His Holy Spirit to give His gracious gifts: Forgiveness, new life, eternal salvation. Baptism is not merely a onetime event; rather we live in the water and Word of baptism every day of our lives.

What does Baptism do?

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. Romans 6:3-4

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ... 1 Peter 3:21

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:4-7
See also Acts 2:38; Ephesians 1:15-23; 5:26-27; John 3:5; Galatians 3:26-27

Baptism clearly "does stuff." Baptism is not merely an "ordinance," that is, something human beings do in obedience to command. The Biblical witness is of the "saving" God does through Baptism. The baptized are *buried* with Christ into death, *raised* with Christ into new life *walking*, conscience *cleansed*, *saved*, *washed*, *regenerated*, *renewed*, Holy Spirit *poured out upon*, *justified*, *made heirs of eternal life*. Through water and the Word, God does great things. Through Baptism, God does great things for us!

How can water do such great things?

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Eph. 5:25-27

And 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20 See also: Mark 16:15-16; 1 Peter 3:21-22

Remember Baptism is not only water, but also water together with God's Word, that is, the authoritative command and promise of God Himself. It is not water that does great things but the Word of God with the water. Baptism does great things because Jesus does the washing of water with the word... Baptism does great things because Jesus does great things for us.

Who needs Baptism?

For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." ..for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." Rm. 3:9-12, 23

And 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," Matthew 28:18-19
And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." Acts 2:38-39
See also Psalm 51:5; Mark 16:15-16

"All nations" includes all people, all ages. Peter specifically tells his audience the promise of God in Christ is for everyone, everywhere. Because all have sinned, all are separated from God. Because all are separated all need to be reconnected. In Baptism God reconnects us with Himself through Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

We baptize because Jesus said, "Baptize." There are some Christians who see baptism not as God's action, an event where He is creating and eliciting faith, but rather as an act of human will; a response of obedience to God. Baptism is an ordinance we should obey. Therefore, they see no need for those who cannot "choose" baptism to receive it. However,

the overwhelming majority of believers throughout the history of the church have baptized all ages—from infants to elderly.¹⁴

That everyone, those standing within earshot of Peter and those far off (like you and me), needs Baptism is wonderful, good news. Baptism is for everyone. Baptism as such is a most evangelical gift from God!

Why baptize infants?

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well... Acts 16:14-15a

Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." Luke 18:15-17

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. Colossians 2:11

See also Mark 10:13-16; 1Corinthians 1:14-16; Acts 16:29-3; 18:8

"Household" includes infants/children and more. Jesus did not turn away infants/children because they were too young to understand or make a decision themselves (Only Jesus makes choices relevant to our salvation). Jesus holds up children as examples of faith for us all. Jesus tells us we must become like children in our complete dependence on God for salvation. Salvation belongs to God; it is His to give where, when and how He pleases. The good news is that God chooses to give us salvation freely by means of Baptism!

Circumcision happened on the 8th day after birth. Paul makes a connection between baptism and circumcision. The text does not clearly exclude infants/children from Baptism. On the contrary, children are included. It is best to let the little children come to the font, just as Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them." Let the children come and receive the blessings of forgiveness, life and salvation along with everyone else.

Can infants/children believe?

"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Matthew 18:5-6

A common argument against infant baptism is that an infant/child cannot believe. One so young cannot make an informed choice. Can an infant trust his mother? Though the child cannot cognitively articulate what trust means, let alone necessarily understand what trust is, his behavior proves he does know his mom is safe. Yes, children, from birth can and do trust their parents (need it to thrive). In the same way, a child can trust its Father in heaven who is present with His children by His Holy Spirit.

Baptism is the beginning of a relationship between the Creator and His creatures. Baptism is not merely a onetime event. Baptism is a way of life, a way of living in relationship with God and all creation. The gift of faith given must be cared for and continually "watered and fed" with the Word of God or it will likely wither and die, but neglect of so great a gift does not invalidate the gift itself, does not invalidate the work of God in baptism.

¹⁴ Adapted from *The Christian Faith*, by Robert Kolb. This book offers a great overview of infant baptism.

We bring our children to God in baptism and throughout their lives (daily), we lead them away from themselves in matters pertaining to their relationship with God and point them to their baptism. We point them to Jesus who has saved them and made them Children of God through water and the Word.

As you enter the sanctuary at Immanuel the font is there with water to remind us of our baptism. Baptism is how we enter the Church, the body of Christ. As people enter the sanctuary many touch the water and make the sign of the cross over their forehead or over their heart as a remembrance of baptism. Young and old alike we are all children in the presence of God, dependent on His grace given freely in Holy Baptism!



Is Baptism necessary?

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Luke 23:39-43. See also: Ephesians 2:8-10

It is not Baptism, as an act or rite, which saves, but God's grace on account of Jesus Christ alone saves. The promise of God in Baptism is that God, by means of Baptism (water and Word), bestows saving grace and faith. Baptism is not necessary for salvation, grace received through faith alone is, but Baptism is the ordinary way God gathers His children and gives His saving gifts.

Baptism is a great comfort to the troubled conscience. When our hearts condemn us on account of our sins we sing, "Satan stop your accusation, I am baptized into Christ!" The baptized belong to the one of whom the Father said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Do I need to get re-baptized?

If you were baptized with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit within the fellowship of a Trinitarian Church¹⁵ then the answer is No! Baptism is God's work; it is His name into which we are baptized. If baptism is an act of the human will and a means by which I show my devotion to Jesus and the world, then I would need re-baptism every day. However, if baptism is something God does *to me* marking me, as His child, forgiving me and filling me with His Spirit then there is no need to "re-do" only a need to remember what God has done. (Eph. 4:5)

Does the mode of baptism matter?

No. Immersion, pour or sprinkle baptisms are all equally valid by virtue of water and the Word. A Christian baptism involves water applied to the body of the baptized along with the Word of God, summarized in the phrase "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

¹⁵ Possible exceptions to this include former Latter Day Saints who use water and the name but have so redefined the meaning of the word to make it altogether something else. If you have questions, feel free to speak to Pastor.

Different views of Holy Baptism:

- **The Symbolic View** – Only believers are to be baptized. Baptism does not “do” anything, nor does it give us anything rather it is an outward sign of an inward reality. Baptism is not a sacrament. Baptism is an ordinance, an act of obedience, a public confession of faith wherein the believer identifies him/herself as a Christian. Typically, full immersion in water is required.
- **The Lutheran View** – Baptism is no mere symbol. Baptism is water combined with the command and promise of God. “...baptize all nations... and lo I am with you always to the end...” In baptism, God gives the Holy Spirit, seals his claim upon the individual, plants the seed of faith, which along with teaching of God’s Word, kills the old Adam and gives birth to the new creation in Christ. Baptism is not necessary for salvation. We are saved by God’s grace alone. Baptism is the ordinary means by which God gives His grace, creates and elicits saving faith. The mode (sprinkle, pour or immerse) of baptism does not matter only the Word of God and water.
- **The Roman Catholic View** – Baptism is no mere symbol. Baptism is a sacrament. Commanded by God, baptism is necessary for salvation. Those not baptized are outside the Church and so can have no assurance of salvation other than the mercy of God.

The Lord’s Supper

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. – 1 Corinthians 11:26 (ESV)

Why do we celebrate it?

We celebrate the Lord’s Supper because Jesus tells us to do this. Specifically, Jesus Himself tells us that regular celebration of this meal is to be a part of our life together as a community of faith. In the “Last Supper” Jesus broke bread and said, “This is my body given for you,” and then he took the wine and said, “This cup is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it in the remembrance of me” (Matt. 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20).

What happens in the Lord’s Supper?

We take Jesus at His word when he says that we should receive the bread and wine given in this meal as His very own body and blood. (Matt. 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20) Holding to a high view of Scripture, we admit the mystery. We do not attempt to peer around or beyond these words and see them as purely symbolic or sentimental. Rather through faith, we believe that in this meal we receive both bread and wine and the body and blood of Jesus. Why? Because Jesus said so. Jesus gave this supper to His Church. It is His Supper. Jesus makes it what it is.

Likewise, the Apostle Paul in the New Testament tells us that there are some extraordinary things happening in this Supper. He warns the church in Corinth that to take this meal lightly or to do so in an unworthy manner is a sin against *“the very body and blood of the Lord.”* Paul goes on to say that anyone who takes part in this meal without *‘recognizing the body of the Lord’* that is present there, does so to his/her judgment. If this meal were purely symbolic then why worry about spiritual harm? Indeed, Paul is saying that in this meal—through the promise of Jesus Himself—the body and blood of the Lord are present and carry spiritual power (1 Cor. 11:27-29).

We, along with the majority of Christians throughout history believe that Jesus' body and blood are **really present** in and with the bread and the wine, not merely in a spiritual sense but in a true physical sense in keeping with the nature of our Lord's resurrected body. We also hold that in this meal God grants the faith that receives the forgiveness sins and the promise of eternal life. Why? Once again we go back to the words of Jesus Himself, "...*this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins...*" (Matt. 26:28).

G. E. Veith puts it like this, "In the sacrament, Christ gives Himself to me. All of His promises and everything that He did for my redemption and forgiveness on the cross, are made so tangible I can taste them. I am touching, in fact, the risen Christ as the first disciples did. And God's Word, ringing in my ears as I take this nourishment, tells me that His body and blood are for *me*."¹⁶

Who can take the Lord's Supper?

While some who support a symbolic view of the Lord's Supper allow any and all to take part in this meal, the church family at Immanuel sees things differently. The Apostle Paul is clear in his teaching that both the ability to "examine" oneself inwardly as well as an ability to "recognize" what is happening in the meal are both essential in celebrating it in a worthy manner (1 Cor. 11:27-30). You do not need to be a member of Immanuel but you should be able to accept our belief and practice with a clear conscience.

At Immanuel you may hear or read our belief and practice summarized this way:

*This is not merely a symbol; Jesus is present, not merely in spirit. When we eat the bread and drink the wine Christ gives us his true body and blood and we receive the forgiveness of sins as His words declare, "This is my body... this is my blood... **for you**, for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt. 26:26-28). Faith alone, not human reason, accepts this mystery. If you are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, confess your need, wish to receive God's gifts of forgiveness and intend daily to live the new life freely given, you are welcome at the Lord's Table. If you have questions, please speak to the pastor. Note: The center ring of each tray contains grape juice for those who cannot have alcohol. Gluten-free bread is available for those with allergies.*

For us, this means that those actually receiving the Lord's Supper should be able to answer "Yes" to the following questions:

1. Do you believe you are a sinner in need of the forgiveness of sin?
2. Do you intend to turn from your sin to a new life?
3. Do you believe that Jesus' body and blood are really present with the bread and wine to grant you forgiveness and assure you of your salvation?

Young children and unbaptized guests are always welcome to come to the Lord's Table to receive a blessing, as we believe this meal is an important witness to how God works in this world. For children (~10 years & older) and any adult desiring to take the meal, but unsure of our confession of faith, we offer a two session course called "First Communion Prior to Confirmation," which details our beliefs and prepares people for a lifetime of celebrating this powerful meal.

In fellowship with the LCMS, we at Immanuel practice Closed Communion, which means we always celebrate communion in the context of confession and absolution and under the common confession outlined above. People who reject our confession are asked to not violate their conscience at the Lord's Table (In other words, don't confess unity where there is disunity, rather pray for the day when all divisions will cease. Lord, have mercy).

¹⁶ "The Spirituality of the Cross," by G.E. Veith, p. 52.

What are the other views of the Lord's Supper?

There are three major views of the Lord's Supper:

- **The Symbolic/Reformed View** – We receive only bread and wine. Since Jesus ascended to the Father, his body and blood are confined to heaven and therefore cannot be present here on earth. The words “This is my body,” “This is my blood” are understood symbolically, a figure of speech. Bread and wine *represent* body and blood. For some holding this view, the real presence of Christ refers to Christ's real presence “spiritually” but not physically in any sense. For pure symbolists the meal only remembers what Christ has done, nothing more.

- **The Lutheran View** – We receive bread and wine and Christ's body and blood. All are there, really. Jesus says so (Matthew 26:26-28). The Apostle Paul agrees. How this is so is a mystery. Faith accepts God's Word as it is.

To the Reformed view, Lutherans say *is* means *is* just as Jesus said. In Ephesians 4:10 Paul says Jesus ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. Just prior to his ascension Jesus said, “I am with you always to the end” (Matthew 28:20), therefore Jesus is also with us in the Lord's Supper, his true body and blood are there. To the Roman Catholic view, Lutherans say, along with the Apostle Paul, that we eat bread and drink the cup (1Corinthians 11:26-28). Bread and wine are there and Jesus' body and blood are there, really.

- **The Roman Catholic View** – We receive only Christ's body and blood. The bread and the wine are changed (transubstantiated) into the body and blood of Christ; after the priest says the words of institution, bread and wine are no longer present, really. It may look like bread and wine to the human eye but it's not, really.

The Sacraments | bottom line

This understanding of the sacraments is not just an idea but is reflected in nearly every aspect of our life together. For example, you will see it embedded into Immanuel in the following ways:

- *A regular celebration of Baptism and the Lord's Supper*
- *A regular and proud call to baptism for all ages*
- *Regular teaching on God's grace active within the sacraments*

Addendum | extra info

What is faith?¹⁷

What is faith? Hebrews 11:1 says, *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* That’s a great answer but what is faith?

In American English, we use “faith” primarily as a noun. However, faith, with respect to God, is not primarily a noun; faith is an activity, a unique activity (more to this later). As a noun, faith is some-thing we do or don’t have. Faith is some-thing we do like baseball. Faith is some-thing we choose. Hence, we ask questions like, what is faith? How do I get faith? How do I keep faith? There are many types of faith, which faith do I choose? As if faith were some-thing I need to discern and select.

It takes some effort to transcend “faith as some-thing”. The word “believe” is a bit better but “to believe” is a stative verb, which describes a state of being. To say, “I believe” is like saying, “I hunger.” It’s not really a thing or an activity it’s more a feeling/desire. Besides, in our culture today “I believe” is what people say when our knowledge is unsure. Faith/belief is what I have when I do not have facts! Hebrews 11:1 can be read that way.

We need other vocabulary. The more helpful English words are “Trust” and “Dependence.” Faith is a relationship of trust and dependence. Trust, as we all know, is the basis of relationship. Those we trust/depend on are “with us” in relationship. At the heart of questions about faith is a longing for trust-worthy relationships we can depend on absolutely, every time, all the time.

In that sense, we all have faith. The 16th century pastor Martin Luther says the first commandment means whatever we ultimately trust is our god. Some people depend on their own reason or intuition, rationality or emotionality. Some trust other people, family, community, ideology, vocational identity and even, yes, “faith” or “religion.” In other words, everyone has a god; everyone has faith. It’s a question of what/who is your god and is your god trust-worthy, absolutely, every time all the time?

This is where faith talk leads when faith is some-thing. Faith I do or choose for myself, with or without facts, is unstable stuff. If faith is some-thing or even a warm fuzzy testimony burning in my bosom then I wonder, “Do I have faith when I’m asleep?” What about when I am mindlessly grinding through my day giving no thought to faith at all? What about the moment I’m unforgiving, harboring hatred in my heart and get hit by a bus? Did I die without faith? When I get dementia and can no longer think clearly about breathing or swallowing let alone choose my faith or be certain of it? If faith is some-thing I choose then I am in and out of faith all the time and my faith is tenuous at best.

Faith is a unique activity. Faith is a relationship God gives us and keeps us in *with* Him. God is active; we are passive. God gives; we receive. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. Jesus is God *for us*, a relationship we can depend on absolutely, every time, all the time. This means, in Jesus, we have faith even when our actions appear to be contrary to faith or when we doubt faith, don’t feel faith, or can’t comprehend faith at the moment.

By faith, we trust Jesus who came into our world not to condemn but to save. We depend on Jesus who restores our relationship with God by what he has chosen to do for us: dying and rising, daily and abundantly forgiving our sins.

One of the great misconceptions about Christian Faith is that it’s something beyond reason, some-thing we have to “choose” or “do” in order to have it and keep it (whatever “it” is).

Entirely unlike other “faiths”, Jesus doesn’t merely give us a path and a choice and leave us to it. Jesus makes a choice and walks the path for us, inviting us to follow him, in relationship with him. The Christian Faith is a relationship given to us by God the Father, through Jesus His Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Christian Faith is a life lived by trust in God and by Love for all creation. If I must summarize: Faith is trust in Jesus and love for neighbor. I’m not so concerned about my “choice” to trust Jesus as I am about the choice He made for me, to restore my relationship with God. My trust is not particularly

¹⁷ Essay by Rev. Kevin Fenster revised from December 2011 issue of the Immanuel Messenger.

trust-worthy but what Jesus does and gives to me is trust-worthy absolutely, every time, all the time!

Baptism is a beginning, marking our entry into this relationship of trust in the promises of Jesus. The Lord's Supper is sustenance for the growth of our relationship in and with Jesus.

What is faith? Faith is a relationship with Jesus created and sustained by Word and Sacrament. In Jesus, faith is complete; though the adventure of living in relationship with Him continues...

When do we celebrate the sacraments?

Immanuel's baptismal font is always ready for baptism. Immanuel celebrates the Lord's Supper on the first and third Sunday of every month and other special days.

The Lord's Supper | other names

Depending on which Christian tradition you are from you may be more familiar with the Lord's Supper by different names. None of the names is more valid; each simply emphasizes a different aspect of the meal. Here is a quick overview:

- **Holy Communion:** emphasizes the connection made between believers (on earth and in heaven) and God.
- **The Sacrament of the Altar:** emphasizes the location of the meal where Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
- **The Eucharist:** emphasizes the celebratory aspect of the meal and thanksgiving for what it delivers.
- **The Breaking of Bread:** emphasizes its nature as a family meal.
- **The Lord's Supper:** emphasizes that it was instituted by, and belongs to Jesus.

Baptism & The Lord's Supper | Luther's Small Catechism

In 1529, the pastor and reformer, Martin Luther, published his Small Catechism (basic teaching). He designed it to equip parents to teach the basic tenets of the Christian faith to their families. He organized this Catechism in six chief parts:

1. **The Ten Commandments.** Where we learn to see what the new creation (the image of God restored) looks like.
2. **The Apostles' Creed.** Where we learn to confess our faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. **The Lord's Prayer.** Where we learn to enter into personal conversation with God.
4. **The Sacrament of Holy Baptism.** Where we learn about how God drowns the sin that separates us adopts us as His beloved children, making us heirs of eternal life.
5. **Confession.** Where we learn how to confess our sins and receive absolution, that is, the entire forgiveness of all our sins from God Himself.
6. **The Sacrament of the Altar.** Where we learn about how Christ gives us His own precious body and blood in, with and under bread and wine to give us the forgiveness of sins he won for us on the Cross.

At Immanuel, we have found this to be a simple, yet effective tool for all ages in understanding key parts of the faith. Here we include Luther's explanation of the Sacraments:

BAPTISM

As the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his household

I.

Q. What is Baptism?

A. Baptism is not just plain water, but it is water contained within God's command and united with God's Word.

Q. Which Word of God is this?

A. The one which our Lord Christ spoke in the last chapter of Matthew:

Go into all the world, teaching all heathen nations, and baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

II.

Q. What does Baptism give? What good is it?

A. It gives the forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the Devil, gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, just as God's words and promises declare.

Q. What are these words and promises of God?

A. Our Lord Christ spoke one of them in the last chapter of Mark:

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; but whoever does not believe will be damned.

III.

Q. How can water do such great things?

A. Water doesn't make these things happen, of course. It is God's Word, which is with and in the water. Because, without God's Word, the water is plain water and not baptism. But with God's Word it is a Baptism, a grace-filled water of life, a bath of new birth in the Holy Spirit, as Paul said to Titus in the third chapter: *Through this bath of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit, which He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, that we, justified by the same grace are made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying.*

IV.

Q. What is the meaning of such a water Baptism?

A. It means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance, and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, in turn, a new person daily come forth and rise from death again. He will live forever before God in righteousness and purity.

Q. Where is this written?

A. Paul says to the Romans in chapter six:

We are buried with Christ through Baptism into death, so that, in the same way Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, thus also must we walk in a new life.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

(THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR)

As the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his household

I.

Q. What is the Lord's Supper?

A. It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under bread and wine for us Christians to eat and to drink, established by Christ Himself.

II.

Q. Where is that written?

A. Matthew, Mark, Luke and Paul write this:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the night on which He was betrayed, took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to His disciples and said: "Take! Eat! This is My body, which is given for you. Do this to remember Me!" In the same way He also took the cup after supper, gave thanks, gave it to them, and said: "Take and drink from it, all of you! This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you to forgive sins. This do, as often as you drink it, to remember Me!"

III.

Q. What good does this eating and drinking do?

A. These words tell us: "Given for you" and "Shed for you to forgive sins." Namely, that the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are given to us through these words in the Lord's Supper. Because, where sins are forgiven, there is life and salvation as well.

IV.

Q. How can physical eating and drinking do such great things?

A. Of course, eating and drinking do not do these things. These words, written here, do them: "given for you" and "shed for you to forgive sins." These words, along with physical eating and drinking are the important part of the Lord's Supper. Anyone who believes these words has what they say and what they record, namely, the forgiveness of sins.

V.

Q. Who, then, receives such a sacrament in a worthy way?

A. Of course, fasting and other physical preparations are excellent disciplines for the body. But anyone who believes these words, "Given for you," and "Shed for you to forgive sins," is really worthy and well prepared. But whoever doubts or does not believe these words is not worthy and is unprepared, because the words, "for you" demand a heart that fully believes.

The Church | week six

...But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.—1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)

What is the Church?

The Nicene Creed¹⁸ is the most universally used creed in Christendom. With respect to the Church, this creed confesses: I believe in one holy catholic (whole) and apostolic Church, I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Church is One, Holy, Whole, and Apostolic.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:1-6 (ESV)

The church is not merely a denomination, a tradition, a building or programs. The Church is the Body of Christ existing both here in time and in eternity. The Church is one and many, universal and local. It is both visible and invisible. The Church is visible where the Word is proclaimed in all its truth and purity and the Sacraments are rightly administered. The Church is invisible as it transcends place and time, as it is comprised of all true believers, who are not always distinguishable from false believers.

The Church is both the mystical union of people with Christ and an apostolic school for nurturing agents of the new creation, bearers and bringers of Christ's love in this world. The church is the community—everywhere throughout time—that God has gathered and made holy in His name by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. This includes the followers of God in the Old Testament who had a faith in God's Word and promises, all of which pointed to Jesus (2 Cor. 1:20; Hebrews 11-12:2).

While all those who believe and are baptized are members of God's universal family (Eph. 2:19) each of us are also called to be connected and committed to a local family where each can learn, serve, give and grow within the body of Christ. All members of God's universal family have a part to play in a local family as we are called to enrich lives by sharing the loving word and ways of Jesus (Eph. 4:12; 1 Peter 2:9-10).

Within His church—for the sake of good order, effectiveness, and accountability—God has called some men as Pastors to oversee the life of the local church; namely, the proclamation of God's Word, celebration of the Sacraments, care of God's people, and faithfulness to the mission (Acts 6:1-6, 14:23, 20:28; Titus 1:5; 1Cor. 14:33, 40). In a local sense, the Church is Pastor(s) and people together, following Jesus in loving service and witness to a local community *and beyond*. The local gathering of believers calls pastors according to the apostolic pattern and teaching. (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) While Pastors are called to *lead* the church, all believers are called to *be* the church: one, holy, universal, apostolic.

Why an organization? Because, as members of one another we are better together! We are encouraged to gather Heb. 10:24-25, but there is no command that the church form any particular organization. We "organize" for the sake of good order, mutual accountability and advocacy. All human organizations are infected with sin but we trust Jesus (Mt. 18:20) and seek to live in harmony with Paul's words in Rom. 12 for the sake of our mission.

¹⁸ See page 64.

What is culture?

While we are members of God's family, we are also citizens of the world. This means each day we live in the midst of rituals, traditions, beliefs, art, media and ways of living and understanding life that make up our own, unique cultural context. Missiologist, Leslie Newbigin, offers a helpful definition of culture:

"When we speak of culture in its broadest sense, we are speaking about the sum total ways of living that shape (and also are shaped by) the continuing life of a group of human beings from generation to generation. We are speaking about the language that enables them to grasp, conceptualize, and communicate the reality of their world; about law, custom, and forms of social organization, including marriage, family, and agriculture. These things shape the life of each member of the society. They are also shaped, modified, and developed from generation to generation by the members of the society. From the point of view of the individual member they are given as part of the tradition into which he or she is born and socialized. But they are not changeless absolutes."¹⁹

It is within our own, unique cultural context that each local church is called to live and do its work of trusting God and loving all creation, changing lives through the message of Jesus.

Church in culture=Church in Mission (Sacramental Church)

I [Paul] have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.—1Corinthians 9:22b–23 (ESV)

The church has a clear mission, given by Jesus who is our leader and Great Shepherd: to love God and to love our neighbors (Matt. 22:37-40). Later, Jesus gave detail to this mission by telling his disciples, and therefore us, that while we go about our daily lives in this world we are to make disciples by baptizing and teaching (Matthew 28:19) empowered by the Holy Spirit to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

God does not call us for our own sakes alone but for the sake of all the peoples of the earth. God's mission was never limited to one tribe or people group but to all nations ("nations" means all people, everywhere, for all time). After His resurrection, "Jesus said to them [disciples] again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.'" Being a missional church means being a sent church. Sent into the world to announce the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name, carrying out the ministry of reconciliation (2Cor. 5:18).

Being a missional church begins by keeping this mandate from Jesus at the forefront of our life together as God's family. In all that we say and do, we seek to trust God and to love our neighbors through the sharing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In order to do so, the local church must be mindful—if not masters—of the local culture.

To effectively share the Gospel, engage the community, and see lives transformed, the local church must understand the local culture to such a degree that the message of Jesus can be fitted (not altered) to the particular people, particular place, and particular time in which they live. While the Gospel of Jesus Christ never changes (1 Cor. 15:3-8) it must be *contextualized*. For example, this means speaking the Gospel in a language that people can understand in biblically faithful concepts that can be grasped by the hearers. Immanuel began as the German Evangelical Lutheran Mission but even the first pastor sought to increase the percentage of English speaking services in order to speak to the culture.

¹⁹ Leslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, p.142.

Missional churches are those who readily embrace the tension of communicating the message of Jesus in culturally engaging, yet faithful ways. They are likewise dedicated to the hard work of living under God's Word, deciphering a culturally relevant expression of what God has and is doing through Jesus Christ, as well as listening to what God's Word is calling us to change, repent of, leave alone, or redeem as a community. Mr. Newbigin continues "But they [cultural factors] must serve the purpose of Christ, and they are open to challenge by those who are in Christ, those to whom has been entrusted the secret of God's purpose to sum up all things, including all the powers, with Christ as their head (Eph. 1:10)."²⁰

For Immanuel, being a missional church means that we are called to wrestle with such issues as worship style, congregational dynamics, family values, the demands of school and work, and personal preferences. We do not seek to bring about utopia on earth. Neither do we presume to "build the kingdom of God" (the kingdom is within us by the Spirit). We merely seek to live under Jesus' active reign and rule and follow Him as our Lord.

Mission | gone wrong

As said above, being a missional church is tough work, involving tough questions and tough choices. Inherent in it all is the risk of sinfully selling out one of two extremes: syncretism or sectarianism. Perhaps unfamiliar words, but we need to know them.

Syncretism | *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* —Romans 12:2 (ESV)

Syncretism occurs when culture is elevated above the truth of God's Word, culture becoming the driving authority within the church and mingling the clear teaching of Scripture with cultural beliefs and agendas. This is often associated with liberal Christianity where the desire to love our neighbor overshadows faithfulness to Christ and obedience to God's Word.

Sectarianism | *I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.* —John 17:15 (ESV)

Sectarianism occurs when life as the church is elevated above the Gospel of Jesus and His mandate to seek and save our neighbors. Through a fear of sin and ultimately a lack of trust in God, the church withdraws from society, creating an isolated, Christian subculture (rather than entering into culture as missionaries) where the church wrongly thinks evil is being kept out. This is often associated with fundamentalist Christianity where a desire to love Jesus and be obedient to the Word unfaithfully overshadows the call to love our neighbors in the world.

Mission | going anyway

For missional churches, like Immanuel, the risk of syncretism and sectarianism is always present. Yet we run the risk anyway. To be faithful to our mission of trusting the Lord and loving our neighbor we must walk the line, we must live in the tension of being true to God's Word yet engaging to the culture, trusting the Holy Spirit to both keep us from error and make us effective agents of His new creation (Eph. 3:20-21).

At Immanuel, this means that we are a community of faith that is culturally progressive and yet theologically conservative. Progressively, we use current technology as available; pastor does not always wear full vestments, we write our own liturgies, we use musical instruments/musical styles other than traditional pipe organ/hymnody in worship; women

²⁰ *The Open Secret*, p. 143.

have full voting rights and may hold any leadership position on the church council. Conservatively, we hold a high view of Scripture and fully subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions, pastor does often wear full vestments; we use traditional liturgy and hymnody; only men serve as Pastors.

As we walk together on this two-fold path, we are driven by the Gospel to trust the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, to love our neighbors, our community, and ultimately our world by calling all to repentance and faith in Jesus.

Mission | at Immanuel

We see a church so compassionate that people are drawn from all walks of life into a learning, loving, living community of hope where questions are welcome, answers are discovered, and acceptance is freely given. How we seek to do that is expressed by our mission statement:

*We are here to enrich lives by sharing
the loving word and ways of Jesus.*

The ways of Jesus are teaching, healing service and suffering. This mission keeps us focused on sharing the life-changing message of Jesus in a way that embraces yet transforms our local community. We seek to be a church that embraces a range of cultural tastes, the arts, creative technology and humor, while clearly confronting culture with a bold proclamation of God's Word.

In connection with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, we believe God calls us into community to walk together by His Spirit growing in Faith toward God and in Love toward one another. By Faith and Love, we live new lives here in time and for eternity!

In recent years, our mission has led us to open our facility freely to the community, hosting support groups, community parties and meetings. We are active in the Sandy Ministerial Association, working with other congregations for the good of our community and beyond. We are always seeking opportunities to be a resource for our community and welcome people to come start something new!

Missional Church | bottom line

This understanding of mission is not just an idea but is reflected in nearly every aspect of our life together. For example, you will see it embedded into Immanuel in the following ways:

- *A relaxed, good-humored fun in our formality*
- *Teaching that is biblically grounded yet considerate toward culture*
- *Straightforward, everyday, appropriate language*
- *Activities geared toward the perceived needs of the local community*
- *A progressive stance on many cultural, yet not biblically mandated issues*
- *A conservative stance on Scriptures and our Lutheran Confession of Faith*
- *A serious minded commitment to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*

Homework | fifteen minute intensive

For next time, please complete the following activities. They are designed to help you reflect on what we've discussed. Come ready to ask questions and defend your insights.

1. Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-24. Here Paul is talking about the lengths he is willing to go to in order to share the message of Jesus. What do you think Paul means when he says, "I have become all things to all men...?"
2. Does this mean that it is okay to do anything in order to share the Gospel? Why / why not?
3. Read again Newbigin's definition of culture on page 60. In three sentences or less, how would you describe the culture of Sandy, Oregon to a friend?
4. Which feature of Immanuel's mission-focused style do you like the best? Why?

Which feature do you struggle with the most? Why?

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of His Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God,
begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father,
by whom all things were made;
who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man;
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.

He suffered and was buried.

And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures
and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father.
And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead,
whose kingdom will have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified,
who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church,
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins,
and I look for the resurrection of the dead
and the life τ of the world to come. Amen.

Addendum | extra info

The Church is One²¹

And he [Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, Eph.4:11-13 (ESV)

In Scripture, God reveals Himself as One God in Three Persons, a unity of substance and diversity of persons. God created man and woman that the two would become one. In creation, there is unity and diversity (Gen 1-3).

In the Church, there is unity and diversity. **The Church is One:** *"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. **The Church is Diverse:** *"But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift." (Eph. 4:1-7 ESV)**

Jesus prayed for our unity and diversity: *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." (John 17:20-23 ESV)*

Of course, sin infects our unity and our diversity. Unity comes to mean "uniformity" and diversity means, "each one does what is right in his own eyes." Sin destroys the harmony of unity and diversity and we err to one or the other extreme.

Jesus came into our world to reconcile us to God and one another. Reconciling us, Jesus kills hostility thus making peace (Ephesians 2:14-16). Jesus prayed that we might be one in the same way that He and the Father are One. He gave us one baptism, one body and blood and we who are many are one body for we all partake of that one bread (1 Corinthians 10:17).

Oneness as a harmony of unity and diversity is at the heart of our present day emphasis on "celebrating diversity." Politically, we talk about "reaching across the aisle" to find common ground, to work together for the greater good. We praise individualism and struggle to "get along" as a society. We want oneness but amidst the chaos of diversity (celebrate the individual) unity is elusive.

The Christian life is a lifelong walking toward oneness with God, with one another and all creation. I believe the walking "toward" part is crucial. Through faith, we move toward Jesus who is always moving toward us. By love (because He first loved us), we move toward one another. To move toward is to move away from self toward the other. Where people are moving toward each other, seeking to love and serve the other, to listen, to accept the other in Jesus' name the harmony of unity and diversity lost in the fall returns, giving us glimpses of the image of God in Christ. Where we are walking toward oneness, our Lord is in the midst of us and all the harmonious gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation are ours visibly.

Walking toward oneness does not just happen on its own. No, sin has so infected us. We are captive to disharmony and tend toward the stifling demands of uniformity or the unsettling discord of everyone doing what is right in their own eyes.

Our walking toward begins with repentance, the confession of our sins and ends with faith's reception of God's gracious absolution full and free. Our walking toward oneness grows as we walk together under God's Word and Sacraments where the Holy Spirit is actively recreating us in the image of God who is One Triune God. In Him, we have unity without uniformity. In Him, we have unity with diversity; we are separate while remaining together. Walking toward oneness the prayer of Jesus is answered, we are made one, we are "...built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

²¹ Essay revised from Nov 2011 issue of the Immanuel Messenger by Rev. Kevin Fenster

Immanuel Life Together (part two) | week seven

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights...—James 1:16-17a (ESV)

God owns everything.

There is a great misconception at work in the world—particularly in 21st Century American culture. A misconception hinges on ideas such as power, control and independence. It is the misconception that all I have, money, possessions, and talents; be they bought, traded, or received as gifts, all belong wholly to me. It is an understandable misconception. After all, it was my hard work that brought in the dollars that purchased the car and it was my years of practice that honed my different skills, wasn't it? Yes, it was. But even so, that doesn't mean you really, truly, own a thing.

If we look at our “stuff” through the lens of Scripture, we get a drastically different view of things. At a basic level, we see that all things find their origin in God as Creator and that all things continue to exist according to His power and His planning (Gen. 1:1; Deut. 8:17-18).

Throughout Scripture, we also see God reminding us that everything ultimately has His name written on it; that is, everything belongs to Him. The psalms put it plainly, when they say, *“The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein”* Ps. 24:1)

With this understanding, we can see there really is no such thing as being an “owner” at all. Instead, we see ourselves as “stewards”—someone who manages and protects the property of someone else. While all people, right now, are living as stewards of God's property, not all practice **Christian stewardship**. We believe everything (including one's self and one's talents) belongs to God and actively seek to manage (steward) it all according to His will.

Generous | with my talents

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...
—Ephesians 4:11-12 (ESV)

God has gifted us with more than just money. Indeed he has given each of us unique talents and skills; skills that God not only intends for us to employ in building a full and wonderful life but also in furthering His mission and building up the church.

Natural gifts

All people are born with natural gifts, talents, inclinations and abilities. These range from the very practical (knack for cooking) to the brilliant (ability to compose a symphony) and are all a gift from God, equipping people for life in His world and in various vocations.

These natural gifts also have a place in God's church. Called to live together as God's children, and seeking to serve the world, each of our gifts has a part to play. Just as we aim to give a portion of our financial blessings to the work of God, so too our natural gifts are offered up in service to His mission.

Spiritual gifts

The Bible tells us that God also gives special gifts to His baptized children through the power of the Holy Spirit and that He repurposes our natural gifts for use in the church. Those are often referred to as “spiritual gifts.” The Bible is clear that every follower of Jesus has at least one spiritual gift and that some may have many.

While the Holy Spirit gives and empowers these gifts, we do not view spiritual gifts as magical but instead as practical, everyday tools for use in service of the Immanuel's

mission. The purpose of these gifts is clear: to equip the local church for the task of spreading the Gospel and growing in faith. (1 Cor. 12:11, 18; Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Peter 4:10)

Six separate lists of gifts appear in the New Testament. (1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30; Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11; 1 Peter 4:11). While there is much debate as to just how God manifests and uses these gifts, we at Immanuel believe that God is active, giving His gifts. Each of us should seek to discover our Spirit given gifts and then work with the church to ensure the family of God receives the benefits of our gift(s).

Below is a list of the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament:

Administration	Giving	Teaching
Apostle	Healing	Leadership
Discernment	Helps	Mercy
Encouragement	Tongues	Miracles
Evangelist	Knowledge	Pastor
Faith	Serving	Prophet/Prophecy

How can I discover my spiritual gifts?

- Seek the counsel of church leaders and mature Christians.
 - Acts 13:1-4; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6
- Begin serving in various areas to discover what seems like a good fit for you.
 - Rom. 12:1; Isa. 6:8
- Think through your areas of burden and joy, as those may be areas that God is leading you for a ministry opportunity.
- Seek to recall ways God is already using you to bear fruit for Him, since that may be an indication of your gift(s).
- Take an on-line assessment such as the one found at www.kodachrome.org/spiritgift.

Generous | with my time

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5:15-16

We live in busy times. It seems everyone can say, "I'm busy!" The truth is we all have 24 hours in every day and we all make decisions about what we do with the time we have. We work, we sleep, we eat, we exercise, yes. Some things we need to do for our health and financial needs. We also we have more "free time" than ever.

We seek to be good stewards of our time by not allowing outside interests or activities keep us away from worship, service and learning which are vital to our life in Christ. Not everything needs special talents or money. Time may be our most highly valued resource and so, in Jesus' name, we encourage one another to be generous with our time.

Generous | with my money

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. – 2 Corinthians 9:7-8 (ESV)

The Bible talks a lot about money. In fact, the one who seems to talk about it the most is Jesus. Some 25 percent of Jesus' words in the Gospels are related to the topic of worldly resources and the right stewardship of them. The reasons why are simple: money is a critical component to the health and growth of God's people. Yet, due to its role in our lives,

it is connected inextricably to our hearts and therefore is a prime object of idolatry (Matt. 6:21; 1 Tim. 6:10; Heb. 13:5). We do not fear, love and trust our money above all things, rather we trust God to give us this day our daily bread.

One word summarizes the Scriptural framework for being good stewards of our money: **generosity**. Specifically, God desires us to be generous with our money in living out each of the following purposes:

- Advancing the Gospel and sustaining the life of the local church (Prov. 3:9; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:12)
- Providing for the needs of family (1 Tim. 5:8)
- Serving and blessing others
- Personal enjoyment (Ecc. 9:7)

Christians have often referred to the regular and generous support of the life of the local church and her mission of sharing the Gospel as tithing. This word, which literally means “tenth”, finds its root in the regulation found in the Old Testament whereby the Israelites were to give tithe of their income to the temple, funding the ministry of the Levites or the priests. Some scholars have argued however, that rather than a narrow reading of “tenth”, when one combined this regulation with others in the Old Testament, that it was not uncommon to tithe more than 25 percent toward the life of the temple (Num. 18:21-29).

While the New Testament uses rarely the word “tithe”, the expectation of God’s people sacrificially supporting the life and mission of the local congregation remains. While the New Testament does not outline a specific percentage, Scripture does tell us our generosity should be a **“first-fruit”** (first and best of what we earn) cheerfully given, *proportionate to our income* (Mark 12:41-44) and consistent (Prov. 3:9; Malachi 3:10; 1Cor. 16:1-2; 2Cor. 8:5; 9:7).

Seriously, what should I aim for?

At Immanuel, we encourage what we call the Portion Principle; giving a generous portion of our income for God’s work and living off the rest. This does not mean the entire portion of our giving necessarily comes to Immanuel but to all of God’s work in this world as the Spirit leads you to support other charities and missions.

While some balk at any talk of a “generous portion,” we believe stewardship matters to membership. We want to have candid, transparent conversations about the congregation’s financial opportunities and needs. We believe our personal giving should be such that it reflects the priority God holds in our life and, in essence, says to God and the rest of the world “God is more important than the stuff I think I want.” God alone is able to truly provide for my every need.” (Gen 22:14).

What if I can’t afford to be so generous?

If you truly cannot afford to give any portion of your income back to God, it may mean you are giving too much to yourself. You may need to revise your spending habits and make use of a budget. If you are in an unusual personal situation, (struggling single parent, sudden loss of work, medical expenses) then you should seek trusted members of the church for support and advice.

Honestly, the spiritual benefit is freedom from the burden of financial worry and the snares of materialism. We pray as Jesus taught us, “Give us this day our daily bread” and rejoice in God’s affirmative answer to our prayers.

Giving at Immanuel | two primary ways

Those who call Immanuel home invest in this ministry and the mission God is doing here through their tithes and offerings. Tithes support the community life of God’s church. Offerings expand the mission life of God’s church.

- **Tithe:** A tithe is your regular, consistent, and proportionate gift to God’s work. It is the first fruits of what God has given you financially. Typically, we give our tithe on a

Sunday morning during worship. At Immanuel, these gifts go to the General Fund, providing for staff, facilities and programs, supporting our community life ministries such as Children's, Youth and Music.

- **How to give your Tithes:** You can give your tithe on Sunday mornings via a Finance Team issued envelope and placing it in the plate or mail it to the office at PO Box 686 Sandy, OR 97055. Offering envelopes facilitate reporting for your personal Income taxes while protecting your anonymity. You may also give Online via Paypal (Paypal charges Immanuel 2.9% + 30¢ per transaction) or you may sign up to give via Joyful Response (No transaction charge). Please contact the Church Office for more information about Joyful Response: Office hours M-Th 9AM – 1PM 503.668.6232 / office@immanuelsandy.com. Or see immanuelsandy.com.
- **Offerings:** These gifts are an occasional “above and beyond” financial commitment, helping to fund special mission objectives.
- **How to give your Offering:** For an overview of current “above and beyond” objectives, see Immanuel's various communications media: bulletin boards, newsletter, weekly bulletins, www.immanuelsandy.com. You may designate offerings via the envelope on a Sunday morning or directly to the office.

Immanuel Life Together | what's expected of you

...walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.—Colossians 1:10 (ESV)

At Immanuel we have no desire to be a church of consuming observers who sit back and watch a select few people along with burnt out pastors and staff do all of the work. We want the Church to be the Church. Worship, service and life-long learning are essential for strong, transformed Christians and a transforming Church. Membership at Immanuel means coming to Divine Service regularly, connecting with opportunities to serve the mission and to grow in faith and life.

Holy Manners

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all (Romans 12:9-18).

The Apostle Paul had a vision of how Christians should behave in the world. The Church is to be a place where love is genuine, where people love each other, show honor to each other, live in harmony with each other, do what is honorable in the sight of all and live peaceably with all. Was he just dreaming? We might think so except that Paul does not use descriptive language. This is not indicative it is imperative! Paul is commanding, exhorting. This is not a wish list. Paul is saying, “Do this!”

We all know his words are easier to say than to do. We are sinful people. In response to his words, we may employ the law to enforce conformity. On the other hand, we may claim free choice saying we are free to behave as we choose in order to get our own needs met. In the current American culture, individual identity is honored and personal preferences rule. Group needs are secondary to the individual. Civility is elusive. Lawsuits abound, but do they make our lives better?

As Christians, we are called to be different, to live in the tension between those two extremes. Paul calls us to submit ourselves, voluntarily, to behaviors that reflect our faith,

behaviors that build up the body of Christ (group identity) and serve the Gospel. We may call this "Obedience to the Unenforceable." We might say "Holy Manners." We should act in conformity to Paul's list of "to do's" not because we are forced to (The Law) and not because we are free not to (Free Choice) but because it is the right thing to do and so good for us and for our community. Such voluntary obedience is an act of faith. We act for the sake of our life together as a congregation in service to the Gospel.

One way we might respond to Paul's exhortation is through mutual acceptance of a behavioral covenant. These points describe the Holy Manners of Immanuel's membership:

- Committed to communication (we keep talking, even when it's not easy)
- Stand your ground and stay connected (don't sever relationships over differences)
- Believe the best – avoid speculation (Let forgiveness reign!)
- Resolve differences at the source (avoid gossip & watch those relational triangles!)
- Expect to make mistakes and learn from them!

Immanuel Connections | your place in the heart of Immanuel

At Immanuel, we strive to make it easy for all people to connect with opportunities for worship, serving and learning. Ministry leaders are active communicators both personally and through our various communications media (bulletin boards, weekly bulletins, monthly newsletter and www.immanuelsandy.com). Whether you've been here for 5 minutes or 50 years, you have a place in the heart of Immanuel.

What's my next step?

Great question. This course has sought to lay a foundation for membership and leadership at Immanuel. The first step is to prayerfully consider whether this is to be your church home. If so, then you are invited to do the following:

1. Fill out the Membership Forms as much as you are comfortable sharing.
 - Faith Story
 - Member Covenant
 - Household Information
2. Have your Membership interview.
 - This can be an informal conversation with Pastor or with members of the Council and Elders. Discuss any questions and let leadership know how you hope to be involved in our life together.
3. Be officially received into membership.
 - This happens on a Sunday directly prior to Prayers of the Church. We invite all new members to come forward and be recognized and welcomed.
 - If you are transferring an LCMS membership, arrange this through the church office.
4. Jump in! Immanuel is your home, your faith community!
 - Find ways to grow spiritually through worship, service and learning.

Life Together | bottom line

This understanding of Life Together is not just an idea but is reflected in nearly every aspect of the HEART of Immanuel. For example, you will see it embedded in the following ways:

- *A frequent emphasis on stewardship and overall generosity in:*
 - *Support of Immanuel's called church workers, facilities and ministries*
- *A constant call to serve in Immanuel's ministries*
- *A high expectation of service and generosity from Immanuel's membership*
- *Frequent opportunities to be generous financially*
 - *Tithe received in worship, Special offerings, Giving campaigns*
- *Programming geared toward nurturing a culture of generous stewards*

Homework | fifteen minute intensive

For next time, please complete the following activities. They are designed to help you reflect on what we've discussed. Come ready to ask questions and defend your insights.

1. What about the distinction between "tithe" and "offering" do you find helpful, or not?
2. Note any encouragements or objections regarding "what's expected of you" at Immanuel.
3. Look up the Scripture references for the list of spiritual gifts on page 69. Which do you feel you may be gifted with? Which gift(s) feel the *least* like you? Why?
4. Read the addendum essay *Life Together | Preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*. Feel free to share your thoughts with pastor/other members.

Addendum | extra info

Life Together | preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace²²

Matthew 21:12a *And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple...*

John 18:11 *So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"*

In the life of our Lord, we see a perfect human being. Jesus knew when to fight and when to surrender. Jesus knew when to be strong and when to be weak. When the moneychangers misused the Temple Jesus drove them out with force. When Peter tried to defend Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus stayed Peter's hand and healed the guard's ear in surrender to the will of God. Jesus knew how to pick the right fight and how to fight with righteous (unopposable) force. Jesus knew how and when to surrender, to submit, to be weak, to allow himself to be humiliated for the sake of others. Jesus being a Jew could ask a Samaritan woman for water. Jesus being a Sinless Man could allow a sinful woman to kiss and wipe his feet with her tears. Jesus being the Son of God Incarnate, with hosts of Angels at his command, could surrender to a mere Temple Guard, submit to a common cross to die like a common criminal. All of Jesus' fighting and submitting glorified God and restored relationships. That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation (2Cor 5.19).

The Law of God demands you and I fulfill our humanity but we fail because Sin infects our every thought, word and deed. When faced with conflict in our lives we respond with strong and weak reactions but tend to do so destructively, harming our unity. We can observe two types of responses²³: Escape Responses and Attack Responses. Escape responses occur when we seek to avoid conflict rather than resolving it. Attack responses occur when we are more interested in winning a conflict than resolving it. Both responses are self-oriented rather than other-oriented. Both responses result in broken relationships rather than whole, healthy relationships.

Escape responses can take three forms from denial (pretend conflict doesn't exist) to flight (retreat from friendship, quit, relocate) to suicide (extreme retreat from life). Attack responses can also take three forms from assault (use of force, intimidation, verbal or physical abuse) to litigation (though sometimes necessary such action always damages relationships) to murder (extreme attack on life).

As Christians, our Lord entrusts us with the message of reconciliation. The Gospel is a third response, our path to peace to the glory of God. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2Cor 5.21). When we experience conflict, we have choices to make. Which response will we choose? Will we escape or attack? Will we pick sides and set out to win? Will we resign ourselves to "the way things are" and do nothing?

Or will we covenant together to move forward in faith, trusting that our Lord is with us giving us what we need to make true and lasting peace, justice and reconciliation? We can look at conflict resolution in two contexts: Personal and Assisted.

Personally, two people in conflict can resolve conflict in three ways²⁴. (1) Either party can simply overlook the offense when the dispute is genuinely insignificant. This is a form of forgiveness, which includes forgetting and letting go. (2) When conflict has damaged a relationship, we need to resolve through confession, correction and absolution. Saying, "I'm Sorry" is never as meaningful as "Will you forgive me?" (3) Where relational issues are

²² Unpublished essay by Rev. Kevin Fenster, Revised Pentecost 16, 2012.

²³ Adapted from "Blessed are the Peacemakers" by Ambassadors of Reconciliation. pp. 9-10.

²⁴ *ibid...* pp.11-13

resolved, negotiation may still be required to resolve material issues related to money or property. The key to successful negotiation is Phil 2.4 *"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."*

When conflict cannot be resolved personally, God's word calls us to seek assistance from other believers. Assistance can come in three ways. (1) If two people cannot reconcile a mediator can help them hear each other more clearly (Mt 18.16). Mediators are merely advisory having no authority to enforce a particular solution. (2) Arbitration grants the mediator authority to enforce a solution. (3) When Christians refuse to be reconciled and do what is right Jesus commands church leaders to intervene to hold people accountable to the Word of God and to promote repentance, justice and forgiveness (Mt. 18.17).

We are all well aware of conflict in the church and we all know how cruel and damaging it is to the witness of our Lord. Too often conflict ends with people quitting, leaving or worse abandoning association with the community of faith all together. As members of Immanuel we have an opportunity to abandon that destructive path. Immanuel has experienced "falling out" in the past. In support of our desire for ongoing growth and renewal of our community, it is vital we take a serious look at how we will plan to work through issues to develop an awareness of how we relate with one another in support of our Lord's missional work here at Immanuel.

It does happen in Christian community, unfortunately, that people are abusive, demanding to have their own way, refuse the discipline of God's Word and the call to reconciliation. This must not be accommodated (escape response), rather such individuals must be "let go" or, if necessary, directed to leave the community for the sake of peace. We acknowledge that we can forgive without having full reconciliation and peace this side of eternity. We cry out, "Lord, have mercy upon us; Christ, have mercy upon us; Lord, have mercy upon us."

In closing, I offer this quote from Paul Tournier, an author who I consider formative in my life of faith and witness, who writes, "Christianity does not teach a doctrine of weakness. But the strength it gives a man is quite different from his natural strength. It is a God-directed (other-oriented) strength, doing what God wills. It wins great victories, but they are over evil and self, not the destructive victories that are won over others."²⁵

²⁵ Paul Tournier, *The Strong and the Weak*, Translated by Edwin Hudson, 1976.

the HEART of Immanuel | faith story

This information will remain confidential.

Name: _____ Age: _____

How did God bring you to Immanuel?

Was the Christian faith a part of your family growing up? Explain.

Are you baptized? If so, when?

What is the greatest change that the message of Jesus Christ has made in your life? *For example: was there a low point of sin or struggle that he pulled you out of, an attitude he changed, a "light bulb" he turned on or a drastic lifestyle change that he brought about in you?*

What do you hope for in your relationship with Jesus? What faith dreams or goals do you have regarding what God might accomplish in your life or through your life?

Signature

- I would like to share my faith story during a worship service.
- I would like to share my faith story online or in the Immanuel Messenger.
(Writing help is available for print media/coaching for public speaking)

Immanuel Lutheran Church | membership covenant

When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. — Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 (ESV)

We live under the umbrella of God's forgiving grace in Christ Jesus. Any commitment you make as a member of Immanuel is between you and God. No one at Immanuel is keeping score. This membership covenant is understood as "obedience to the unenforceable." Your membership in this local body of believers is a blessing for you to be a blessing as you share in all the gifts God has given members of His body the church.

I believe...

- I believe in God, the Father Almighty, in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord, and in the Holy Spirit.
- I believe all the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures to be the inspired Word of God and the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, drawn from them and confessed in the Lutheran Confessions to be faithful and true.

I commit...

- I intend to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully.
- I intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, even unto death.
- I commit to a life of worship, service and learning.
- My current serving role is / will be _____.
- My current learning opportunity is / will be _____.
- I will support the work my gracious Lord has given this congregation with my prayers and with the gifts God has given me.
- I commit to setting aside a portion of my income for God—as a tithe—and to growing in generosity.
- I commit to occasional "above and beyond" offerings in support of special needs.
- I commit to live at peace with all people, so far as it depends on me, to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- I commit to putting the best construction on the words and deeds of others.
- I commit to resolving differences at the source.

Name: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Immanuel Lutheran Church | household info

(Please complete one per home)

Name, address, phone, email will be included in our Church Directory. If you do not want this information published in the Church Directory, please check the box. Please note all information is for Immanuel Lutheran Church only and will not be shared with any outside party.

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Marital Status: S M D W

Spouse's Name: _____ Spouse's Date of Birth: _____

Anniversary Date _____ Divorced/Widowed Date: _____

Occupation: _____ Employer: _____

Spouse's Occupation: _____ Spouse's Employer: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail: _____ Home Phone: _____

Mobile Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

Spouse's Mobile Phone: _____ Spouse's Work Phone: _____

Ethnic Origin: _____ Church Background: _____

Children*	Date of Birth	M / F	School Grade
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

Baptism Record* (list names below if applicable)	Date	Church
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

**Attach another sheet of paper if additional space is needed.*

Confirmation Record* (list names below if applicable)	Date	Church
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

**Attach another sheet of paper if additional space is needed.*

First Communion Record* (list names below if applicable)	Date	Church
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

**Attach another sheet of paper if additional space is needed.*

Additional Information

Maiden Name: _____

Place of Birth: _____

Mother's Name: _____

Father's Name: _____

Military: Yes No Military Branch: _____

Current Status: _____

Education Level: _____

Are you a member of Thrivent Financial? Yes No

Present Activities:

Skills, Talents, and Spiritual Gifts:

Training:

Please check the area(s) you would be interested in helping in:

Children's Ministry

Missions/Outreach

Church Cleaning

Music

LWML

Stewardship

Maintenance

Youth Ministry

Notes

Notes