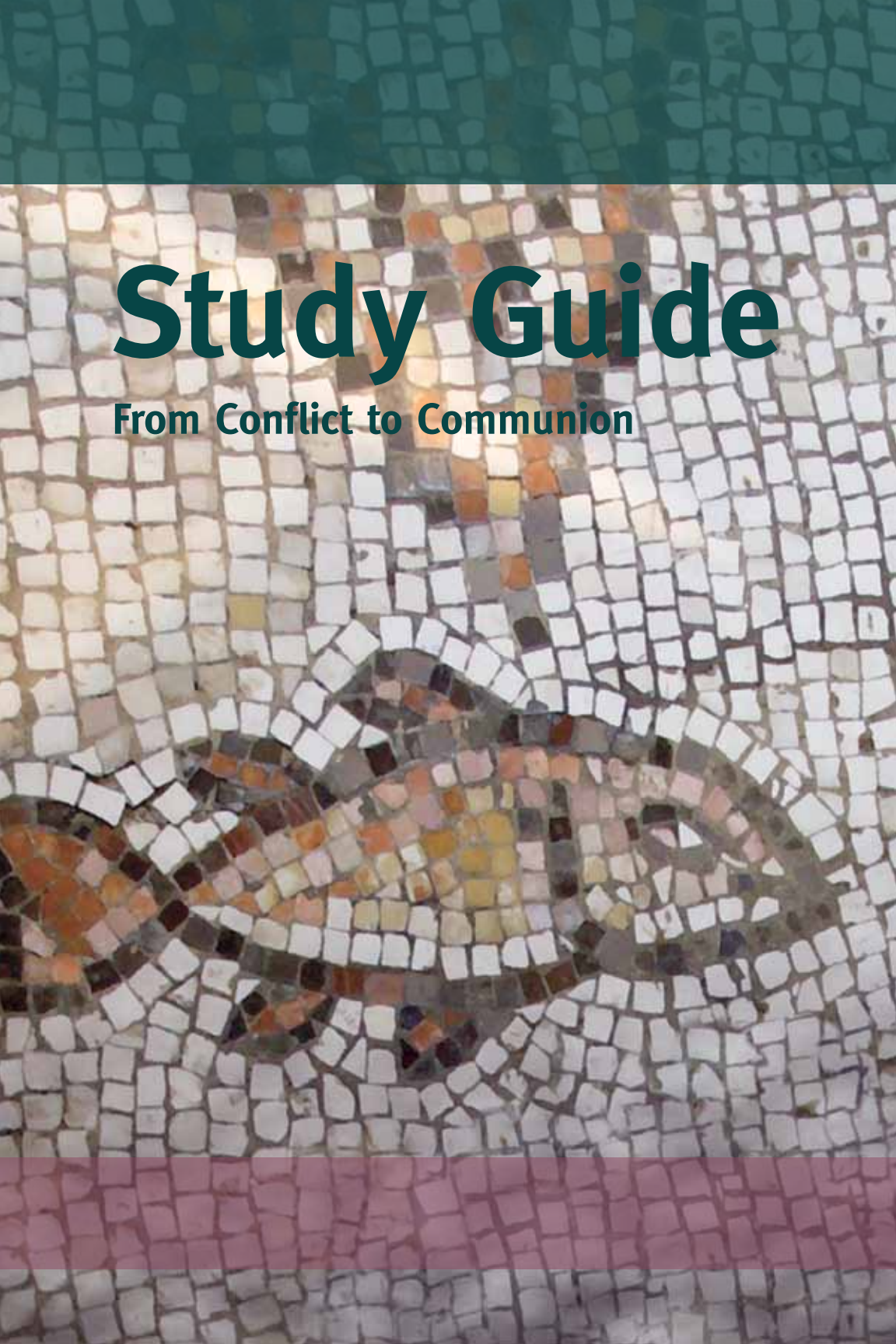

Study Guide

From Conflict to Communion

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Distributed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Written by The Planning Committee of the Diocese of Pittsburgh and the Diocese of Greensburg, The Byzantine Catholic Archeparchy of Pittsburgh, and Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod ELCA

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March 25, 2015, The Feast of the Annunciation

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Beginning with Prayer

Prior to the start of each session, and after appropriate introductions have been made, begin each session with prayer. Pause for a time of silent reflection. Several prayers are offered below. As collegiality develops and the local context is defined, specific prayers and intercession might be offered during this time.

- *God our Father, your Son Jesus prayed that his followers might be one. Make all Christians one with him as he is one with you, so that in peace and concord we may carry to the world the message of your love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, 2006)*

- *Gracious Father, we pray for your holy catholic church. Fill it with all truth and peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where it anything it is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in need, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, 2006)*

- *Most high and holy God, pour out upon us your one and unifying Spirit, and awaken in every confession of the whole church a holy hunger and thirst for unity in you; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, 2006)*

- *For all kinds of Christians we are grateful, acknowledging the Spirit's work in our distinctions, and praying for the grace to perceive the divisiveness that pride creates. In that we are separated sisters and brothers by reason of our own fault, perpetuating the sins of the centuries: Forgive us dear Lord, and unite us in your love. (Carl T. Uehling, The Wideness of God Mercy, Vol. 1, 1985)*

- *God of our lives, by the power of your Holy Spirit we have been drawn together by one baptism into one faith serving one Lord and Savior. Do not let us tear away from one another through division or hard argument.*

May your peace embrace our differences, preserving us in unity, as one body of Jesus Christ our Lord. (Book of Common Worship, Westminster John Knox Press, 1993)

- *Holy God, giver of peace, author of truth, we confess that we are divided and at odds with one another, that a bad spirit has risen among us and set us against your Holy Spirit of peace and love. Take from us the mistrust, party spirit, contention, and all evil that now divides us. Work in us a desire for reconciliation, so that, putting aside personal grievances, we may go about your business with a single mind, devoted to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. (Dionysius of Alexandria, d. 264. Book of Common Worship, Westminster John Knox Press, 1993)*

- *Almighty, ever-living God, who gather what is scattered and keep together what you have gathered, look kindly on the flock of your Son, that those whom one Baptism has consecrated may be joined together by integrity of faith and united always in the bond of charity. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. (Mass for Unity of Christians, collect A)*

- *Attend with favor to the prayers of your people, we ask, O Lord, and grant that the hearts of believers may be united in your praise and in repentance together, so that, with division among Christians overcome, we may hasten with joy to your eternal Kingdom in perfect communion of the Church. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Mass for Unity of Christians, Collect B).*

- *Look with favor on your people, Lord, we pray, and pour out upon them the gifts of your Spirit, that they may grow constantly in love of the truth and devote themselves with zeal to perfect unity among Christians. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. (Mass for Unity of Christians, Collect C)*

- *Heavenly Father, we come to you, the Font of Life, to ask that you fill your Church with Living Water to quench our thirst on the quest for Christian unity. Let our hearts be filled with the gift of your Son's love for us. May we find in your Church the living and abiding presence of your love and work together to bring about the desire of your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ when he prayed, "that they all may be one." May the Spirit never lay dormant within us, but sustain us on the path of life. This we ask through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Prayer for Week of Christian Unity 2015).*

(For our reflection)

"The task of every Christian is to build the unity of the Church. When constructing a temple or a building, the first thing one does is find suitable land. Then one lays the cornerstone, the Bible says. And the cornerstone of the unity of the Church, or rather the cornerstone of the Church, is Jesus and the cornerstone of the unity of the Church is Jesus' prayer at the Last Supper: 'Father, that they may be one!'. And this is its strength! Humility, gentleness, magnanimity: These are weak things, because the humble person appears good for nothing; gentleness, meekness appear useless; generosity, being open to all, having a big heart. The weaker we are with these virtues of humility, generosity, gentleness, meekness, the stronger we become as stones in this Temple. We have been called to a great hope. Let's go there, but with the strength that Jesus' prayer for unity gives us; with docility to the Holy Spirit, who is capable of making living stones from bricks; and with the hope of finding the Lord who has called us, to encounter Him in the fullness of time." (Homily of Pope Francis, October 24, 2014)

Introduction to Study Guide

All of us come to *From Conflict to Communion* and this study guide with a personal history that includes our spiritual journey. Our hope is that this history will enrich our prayer together and our discussions.

We may, however, also bring with us some unresolved feelings about ecumenical dialogue and/or about Lutherans or Catholics we have known. The study may turn out to be a time for identifying past incidents or choices and attendant emotions.

The study guide is designed to increase mutual understanding between Catholics, Lutherans and other friends. It may also be a catalyst for healing and reconciliation communally and individually.

This study guide for *From Conflict to Communion* is intended to assist group discussion of this important common commemoration of the Reformation. As noted in the foreword, "In 2017, Catholics and Lutheran Christians will most fittingly look back on events that occurred 500 years earlier by putting the gospel of Jesus Christ at the center." In order to affirm that center, we are called to take a critical look at how each of our traditions contributed to the loss of unity in Western Christendom. The goal of our mutual commemoration must include remembering our history and continuing our movement toward the unity that Christ wills for His followers.

The study guide begins with reviewing the foreword and the three points in the "Introduction," followed by the consideration of "The Five Ecumenical Imperatives" (Chapter 6). Those who engage with the text will find it helpful to focus on the fundamentals first, in order to go deeper, rather than reading it from cover to cover. The beginning discussion in the first session will help set the tone for looking at the chapters of *From Conflict to Communion.* Sessions may be adjusted and combined as planned.

Session One

Forward and Introduction

Read the Foreword

Read the foreword assigning different persons to read each paragraph. After reading the foreword in its entirety, discuss the following:

1. How is Martin Luther's life characterized? What is the central theme?
   a. Do you think this is a fair characterization? Why or why not?
   b. How does being Catholic or Lutheran color our image of Luther?
   c. Is Luther's statement: "**True theology and the knowledge of God are in the crucified Christ.**" a place that both Catholics and Lutherans can rest in regardless of one's thought on the person of Luther? Explain.

2. If it is true that "**both as individuals and as a community of believers, we all constantly require repentance and reform- encouraged and led by the Holy Spirit**" how might this be a rallying point for a commemoration of the 500th anniversary of 1517?

3. **Review the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification**. What is the shared understanding of justification articulated in the document?

4. Discuss the two challenges identified as integral to the commemorative year:

a. …**the purification and healing of memories**
b. …**and the restoration of Christian unity in accordance with the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ** (Eph. 4:4-6)
c. Offer some initial thoughts about what comes to mind when you read and hear these two goals. Do any practical resolutions of how these might be achieved, or at least worked toward, come to mind? If so please share them with the group. After this is completed ask someone to offer a prayer of petition and thanksgiving that these two general goals may become a reality through our continued conversion of heart and mind in docility to the Holy Spirit.

Read the Introduction: paragraphs 1-3

1. Before delving into the question of Martin Luther as witness to Jesus Christ- ask everyone in the group to express in their own words what it means to be a "witness for Jesus Christ."

2. a. After this is completed spend some time discussing Martin Luther – How was and is he a witness to Jesus Christ? What areas did he excel in doing this? In what ways did he perhaps need to continue to grow?
   b. For silent reflection or to share with the group if so desired: In what ways do I excel as a witness? In what ways do I need to continue to grow?

Session Two: Chapter Six

Five Ecumenical Imperatives

It may seem strange to skip to chapter six in the study guide, but the ecumenical imperatives are very important in studying *From Conflict to Communion* and moving to a new understanding of our life together as Christians.

1. Read aloud paragraphs 238, 239, and the First Imperative prior to discussion.
   a. Why is it important to realize that we belong to the One Body of Christ?
   b. Do we accept one another's Baptism? Why is this important?
   c. Do you feel relieved that we no longer condemn the faith of other Christians? Does this mean that we no longer have differences? How can we lift this up as an alternative voice/face of Christianity?
   d. How does it make a difference that we begin from a perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division?
   e. Share any additional observations about this imperative.

2. Read paragraph 240 and the Second Imperative.
   a. Through the years, Catholics and Lutherans shared in their confessional writings that they were right and the other was wrong in many matters of faith and theology. With a renewed goal of looking toward unity, it is essential to re-visit these problem areas and assess whether what has been written should be rejected, discussed further, or re-evaluated in order to resolve the differences.

Why is it important that we remain patient so that our national and international Lutheran-Catholic dialogues can address differences, as well as consensus agreements?

b. What do you believe it means to be transformed by the encounter with the other and by mutual witness of faith? How would this make a difference as we relate to one another even when there are issues of faith and life that exist?
c. How can we become informed of agreements and continued differences?
d. Share any additional observations about this imperative.

3. Read paragraph 241 and the Third Imperative.
   a. Among subjects that have been addressed through the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (and its predecessor churches) are the following: Scripture and Tradition; The Condemnations of the Reformation Era – Do They Still Divide?; The Status of the Nicene Creed as Dogma of the Church; One Baptism for the Remission of Sins; The Eucharist as Sacrifice; The One Mediator, the Saints and Mary; Teaching Authority, and the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.

      Common statements in the U.S. dialogues were developed and were widely distributed and embraced. There has been an observation that many people are not aware of the statements and agreements, especially those who have not followed developments or who came after the statements were made. Do you believe that the 500th Anniversary would be a good time to become aware of these statements? What would be the advantages of studying them?
   c. Share any additional observations about this imperative.

4. Read paragraph 242 and the Fourth Imperative.
   a. The power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ brings good news to a world that God continues to love and redeem. What would be helpful for you to better understand the gospel and the Christian faith as well as previous church traditions?
   b. Do you believe it is important for Lutherans and Catholics to make a joint faith witness that would share the good news of the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ? How would you support this type of witness? What would be your concerns?
   c. Share any additional observations about this imperative.

5. Read paragraph 243 and the Fifth Imperative.
   a. The Christian faith is often described as irrelevant by people who are outside the church or who have left active membership in the church. Jesus wanted the world to believe so He prayed for the unity of His followers. What are some of the ways in which Lutherans and Catholics could show unity that would attract the attention and possible outreach to non-church persons?
   b. How is the mercy of God seen in your daily life? In your area? In the world? Are there advantages of joining hands as fellow Christians in sharing God's mercy to a world in need?

6. Read paragraph 244 and 245.
   a. Could you affirm Luther's faith insights that are highlighted in paragraph 244?
   b. How does Scripture inform your faith and life?
   c. Paragraph 245 contains some hopeful words and an invitation about hearing and being called. How do you understand what we are to hear together? How can this be done?

Do you believe that it is our Lord's will that we be united in a common mission? Whose mission would it be? How might we discern such a mission together?

Session Three: Chapter One

Commemorating the Reformation in an Ecumenical and Global Age

1. Read aloud paragraph 4
   a. This paragraph deals with "context". Have each person in the group choose one of the three listed challenges-the one that most "grabs" them-and have them briefly elaborate on what it is that captures their imagination about this particular challenge
   b. and/or -if anybody wants to add one of their own that they think has been overlooked they are invited to do so.

2. Read paragraphs 5 and 6 –"The Character of Previous Commemorations"
   a. How have commemorations been handled in the past?
   b. Perhaps a few members of the group can relate personal experiences of how they have commemorated this in the past.

3. Read paragraphs 7, 8, and 9 – "The First Ecumenical Commemoration"
   a. What changes have come about in the past 50 years that will allow Catholics and Lutherans to commemorate 1517 differently in 2017?
   b. "These changes demand a new approach" is the first line of paragraph 8. Building on what has already been discussed, are there "new approaches" that have already come into

existence that you wish to praise or perhaps there are some which you hope to see come into existence? Discuss these.

c. Even when oppositional differences remain what can we learn from 50 years of dialogue, prayer, and worship?

d. Reread this paragraph aloud before discussing. In your own words what are the two points of departure? Is it possible to take **both points of departure** seriously as recommended by the document? Practice this in the group. What can each person affirm about both the Catholic and Lutheran positions?

4. Read paragraphs 10, 11, and 12 – "Commemoration in a New Global and Secular Context"

   a. What experiences do you have with the globalized Church mentioned in paragraph 10?

      In what ways has the development of a global church and Christianity helped to change the context of the confessional conflicts of history? How might these influences impact 2017?

   b. What do you think the last line of paragraph 11 means? "As a result of this forgetting much what divided the church in the past is virtually unknown today." Does the receding of Christian influence actually present an ecumenical opportunity?

   c. Paragraph 12 is a tough one! Even while we lament the divisions of the past this statement invites us to think about what was and is at the heart of the Confessional disagreements. What was and is at the heart? **"How can the traditions be passed on in such a way that they do not dig new trenches between Christians of different confessions"?** In short-can our ecumenical work be incorporated into our particular traditions and become

part of what we hand on? Is ecumenism a part of authentic Christian witnessing?

5. Read paragraphs 13, 14, and 15 – "New Challenges for the 2017 Commemoration"
   a. This could be a wide-ranging discussion, but take some time to discuss the intersection of the culture and the church. In what ways does culture still reflect Christ and Christianity? In what ways have they parted or exist in opposition to each other?
   b. In a similar vein to paragraph 11 how have certain trends perhaps made "old confessional controversies seem obsolete." ….specifically with regard to the phenomena of charismatic churches?
   c. It is new time and a new era-how will the contemporary world impact the Commemoration of 2017?

Session Four: Chapter Two

FROM CONFLICT TO COMMUNION

New Perspectives on Martin Luther and the Reformation

Read Paragraphs 16 – 17

- Why is it important to recognize the "commonalities within the differences" of our respective faiths? Discuss some (of) beliefs Catholics and Lutherans have in common.

Ecumenical Project Preparing the Way for Consensus

Read Paragraphs 18 – 25

- What conclusions might you draw from the research of Catholic scholars in the twentieth century regarding Martin Luther and the Reformation? How might this affect your outlook toward each other's church/religion?

Catholic Developments

Read Paragraphs 26 – 27

- Discuss briefly the themes of Vatican Council II listed below and share your experiences and understanding of each:

Esteem and reverence for the Holy Scripture in the life of the church

- What role does Holy Scripture play in your life? Discuss some similarities between Catholics and Lutherans regarding the use

of Holy Scripture. (Vatican Council II, Revelation: Chapter VI "Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church")

Rediscovery of the common priesthood of all the baptized

- Do you recognize your part in the common priesthood? How does this play out in your daily dealings with others? Is it difficult to speak about your faith with other Catholics/Lutherans or non-Christians? (Vatican Council II, The Church: Chapter I "The Mystery of the Church" Article 15)

Need for continual purification and reform of the church

- How has Vatican Council II impacted your attitude for our understanding of each other's beliefs? How important is participation in Liturgy for you as a Catholic or Lutheran? (Vatican Council II, Ecumenism)

Understanding of church office as service

- At his holy inauguration as Faithful Head of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis stated that we should, "Never forget that authentic power is service" and that "Only those who serve with love are able to protect."

- Discuss what meaning these two statements might have for you as faithful followers of Christ.

Importance of the freedom and responsibility of human beings, including the recognition of religious freedom

- Discuss how the following statements of Vatican Council II impact your understanding of discipleship. What is the Church's divine mission?

  Vatican Council II informs us that "As the spiritual authority appointed by Christ, with the duty imposed by divine command, of going into the whole world and preaching the Gospel to every creature, the Church claims freedom for herself in human

society and before every public authority." (Vatican Council II, Declaration on Religious Liberty, Chapter II, "Religious Freedom in the Light of Revelation," Article 13)

"When the principle of religious freedom is not just proclaimed in words or incorporated in law, but is implemented sincerely in practice, only then does the church enjoy in law and in fact, those stable conditions which give her the independence necessary for fulfilling her divine mission." (Vatican Council II, Declaration on Religious Liberty, Chapter II, "Religious Freedom in the Light of Revelation," Article 13)

"(We) must take into account (our) duties toward Christ, the life-giving Word whom (we) must proclaim, the rights of the human person, and the measure of grace which God has given to each (of us) through Christ in calling (us) freely to accept and profess the faith." (Vatican Council II, Declaration on Religious Liberty, Chapter II, "Religious Freedom in the Light of Revelation," Article 14)

Read Paragraphs 28 - 29

Paragraph 28 states that as a result of Vatican Council II "Catholics today can appreciate Martin Luther's reforming concerns and regard them with more openness."

- How do you as a Catholic or Lutheran relate to this statement?
- Do you see a need for dialogue among members of both faiths? What would you hope to gain from such dialogue/encounters?
- Do you agree with the statement in paragraph 29, that (Luther's) "intention was to reform, not to divide, the church?" Discuss some of the positive and negative things about Catholics or Lutherans that you learned as a child/young person from others: parents, grandparents, friends etc.

Read Paragraph 30

- How do you relate to Pope Benedict's statement about Luther regarding the question of God? What does the question of God mean in your life?

- Do you agree that "most people today, even Christians, set out from the presupposition that God is not fundamentally interested in our sins and virtues?" Why or why not?

Lutheran Developments

Read Paragraph 31

- As a result of Vatican Council II and the historical, social, and theological factors regarding Luther and the Reformation, Catholic and Lutheran theologians are now in dialogue about the commonalities and differences of their respective faiths. Would you agree that some progress has been made here? Do you think future progress toward full unity is possible? Why or why not?

The Importance of Ecumenical Dialogues

Read Paragraphs 32 – 34

Share your thoughts about the following statements:

- "In order to determine the exact relationship between respective articles of doctrine, texts must be interpreted in the light of the historical context in which they arose. That allows one to see where a difference or opposition truly exists and where it does not."

- "Ecumenical dialogue is the common search for the truth of the Christian faith."

Additional reading regarding Catholic-Lutheran dialogue is "Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue" by Cardinal Walter Kasper www.bloomsbury.com

Session Five: Chapter Three

A Historical Sketch of the Lutheran Reformation and the Catholic Response

What Does Reformation Mean? (Paragraphs 35 – 39)

- Give an illustration how two different parties might remember a particular event. Why is it important to "find a common way of remembering past events?"

- When you think about the term "Reformation," what thoughts and feelings come to mind? Is the term a positive, negative, or neutral one for you?

Controversy over Indulgences (Paragraphs 40 - 42)

- What was one abuse which Luther identified in the issuing of indulgences during his time? What other indulgence related questions did Luther have? How do we address and understand these issues today?

- What problem do you think may have been caused by the broad publication of the 95 Theses, as opposed to confining them to the context of academic theological discussion?

Luther on Trial, Failed Encounters, and The Condemnation of Martin Luther (Paragraphs 43 - 51)

- Why was the Vatican alarmed by the broad publication of the theses? How does fear inhibit our ability to hear and understand one another?

- *"Cardinal Cajetan was given the mandate to interrogate Luther….Luther was to recants or….the Cardinal had the power to ban Luther…or to arrest him and bring him to Rome." (#45) "Luther was promised a fair trial. Nevertheless…, he repeatedly received the message that he either had to recant or be proclaimed a heretic." (#46)* These statements imply that Luther's treatment was anything but fair. Is it surprising to you that these comments appear in a jointly written document? Why is it important to talk about the "hard things" in ecumenical discussion?

The Authority of Scripture and Luther in Worms (Paragraphs 52 – 57)

- It is a **caricature** to say that Lutherans adhere to the authority of the Bible alone and Roman Catholics submit to the authority of the pope alone. Is this caricature still alive? Give examples which support or dispel the caricature.

Beginnings of the Reformation Movement (Paragraphs 58 - 61)

- *Roman Catholics:* Do you recognize your experience in any of the changes described in these paragraphs? What is still foreign? *Lutherans:* Do you see yourself participating in the ongoing reform of the Church? If so, how?

Bringing the Scripture to the People, Catechisms and Hymns, & Ministers for Parishes (Paragraphs 62 – 68)

- As Lutherans and Roman Catholics, talk about your experience of a) using the Bible; b) Christian education for children and adults, and the books you used; and c) the use of hymns in church services. Do we share any common experiences?

- Why did early Lutherans use pastors to ordain new pastors? Why did they consider this to be legitimate? How were (and are) these ordinations viewed by the Roman Catholic Church? What place might historical considerations play in the recognition of Lutheran ordination by the Roman Catholic Church?

Theological Attempts to Overcome the Religious Conflict (Paragraphs 69 – 73)

- The first section of the Augsburg Confession sums up doctrine which Lutherans held to be undisputed, differing only in inconsequential matters. The second part deals with matters which were held to be still under dispute. What are some important areas of doctrinal agreement between Lutherans and Catholics today? Where do we still disagree? Do you see the differences which remain as truly "church dividing?"

Religious War and the Peace of Augsburg (Paragraphs 74 – 77)

- In this section we read about some details of the interplay between state and church. How might this European experience have influenced the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution which states: "*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.…*"**?**

The Council of Trent (Paragraphs 78 – 89)

- Trent rejected the Lutheran principle of *sola scriptura*, insisting that Scripture and Tradition taken together bear the fullness of the faith. Give an example of Tradition which is held as part of the faith by the Roman Catholic Church, but which does not appear explicitly in the Bible. Do such elements of Tradition present an obstacle to Christian unity?

- Trent published an "official" list of biblical books. Examine the Table of Contents of a "Protestant" and a "Catholic" Bible. Why does this list of books differ?

- Trent rejected *"the doctrine of justification by faith alone (sola fide), while understanding faith primarily as assent to revealed doctrine….It declared the essence of justification to be not the remission of sins alone, but also the 'sanctification and renovation of the inner man' by supernatural charity."* (#82) Discuss your PERSONAL understanding of the term "faith." Is it intellectual belief alone or does it include something else? How does your understanding bear on the "controversy" between "faith alone," and "faith plus good works?"

- Trent defined seven sacraments. Lutherans generally recognize only two, but have rites which correspond to the other five. Discuss your understanding of Baptism and Eucharist from the perspective of your own tradition. Are you SURE of what your tradition teaches? Did anything your dialogue partner say surprise you?

- Trent taught that the Mass makes present the sacrifice of the cross, but it is *"not a repetition of the once-for-all sacrifice."* (#85) Lutherans teach that in Holy Communion we receive Christ's true body and blood, given to us for the forgiveness of sins. How might these understandings relate to one another?

- We often think in a stereotypical fashion that Roman Catholics focus on the Sacraments and Lutherans focus on the Word. The Council of Trent instituted formal seminaries precisely so that the Word might be proclaimed more effectively. Lutherans understand the Sacraments as "the Word made visible." Discuss your experience of Word and Sacraments as a child, and now as an adult. Have you grown in your understanding? What can Lutherans and Roman Catholics continue to learn from one another about Word and Sacraments?

- Both Trent and the Reformers defined themselves against the other. Until recently we continued to emphasize our differences rather than our similarities. Make a list of everything you can think of which is shared by the two churches.

The Second Vatican Council (Paragraph 90)

- Vatican II said that *"many elements of sanctification and of truth are found"* outside of the Roman Catholic Church. The Council recognized those things which the Roman Catholic Church shares with other Christians, such as: *"the creeds, baptism, and the Scriptures. A theology of ecclesial communion affirmed that Catholics are in a real, if imperfect, communion with all who confess Jesus Christ and are baptized."* But Vatican II was not the last word on ecumenism: For a list of international level dialogues and more information, go to: http://tinyurl.com/LRC-World-Dialogue. For more information on U.S. L/RC dialogue, see: http://tinyurl.com/US-dialogue. For a press release on the current round, go to: http://tinyurl.com/Current-USLRC .

- Discuss: How will you help to spread the word to the people at your church about what you are learning through the study of this document?

Session Six: Chapter Four

Basic Themes of Martin Luther's Theology in Light of Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogues

Introduction

This chapter examines four areas of Martin Luther's theology—justification, the Lord's Supper, Ministry and Scripture/Tradition—with some concluding remarks about ecclesiology. By focusing on Martin Luther's theology, the reader may obtain a better grasp of the origins of specific differences in teaching and the degree to which today's ecumenical conversations have helped to remove misconceptions and have grown to understand the differences between our two communions. Each of the jointly written sections contains enough information to be a chapter in itself, worthy of extended conversation among Lutherans and Roman Catholics today. Given the upcoming commemoration of the Reformation in 2017, it is important that this chapter concentrates not on Lutheran confessional writings (contained in the *Book of Concord*) but Luther's own thought (par. 93).

As the reader goes through this material, it is important to note its structure. It begins with a summary of Luther's perspective, followed by a brief look at Roman Catholic concerns and concludes with an examination of harvest of ecumenical dialogues regarding these points, keeping in mind that the authority of the ecumenical statements varies, with the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* having a higher authority than statements from the dialogues themselves (par. 97).

(1) Justification

A. Central to Luther's theological teaching and to the Reformation was the understanding that we are justified by God's grace through faith. Paragraph 107 emphasizes that God's love for humanity is centered in Jesus Christ so that "by grace alone" is also always "by Christ alone" where the believer's sin is exchanged for Christ's righteousness.

B. In 1999, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification was adopted by the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation. Both communions insisted upon God's grace alone "the forgiving and renewing mercy that God imparts as a gift" (paragraph 124) as the cause of justification. Both communions agree that this takes place by faith alone, understood as the trust based on God's Word.

1. **If this joint doctrine of justification shows a differentiating consensus about how we are forgiven and saved, what does this say about how we treat one another as fellow Christians? (See paragraph 138)**
2. **What do you believe is meant by the Lutheran teaching that we are both saint and sinner at the same time? (paragraph 116)**
3. Luther had a deep commitment to the freedom of the Christian, where the freedom of God's grace and faith in God's promises in Christ result in the freedom to serve one's neighbor spontaneously without seeking merits in doing so" (paragraph 118).

   Should we expect to build up merits for serving our neighbor? Is it sufficient to know that we are acting in love

and not with the expectation that we are rewarded for what we do?

(2) The Eucharist

Luther understood the Lord's Supper as both a promise of Christ's presence (his true body and blood) and a testament of grace and forgiveness. In dialogue, both communions affirm Christ's real presence in the Eucharist without adopting philosophical terminology to explain it.

1. **While we are not yet able to share Holy Communion, how important is it to know that we agree that we receive the Body and Blood of Christ?** (Note: some Christian communions teach that in Communion it is only a spiritual presence or it is simply a memorial.)
2. How have you seen the practice of Holy Communion change in your context? Is there a more frequent reception of Communion?
3. Both Lutherans and Catholics have benefited from the liturgical movement of the twentieth century (viewing the sacrament as a memorial that makes present the events of salvation; affirming other aspects of Christ's presence in the Word and in the assembly; reevaluating other expressions of Christ's real presence, learning to deal respectfully with the elements after the meal).

   How has the liturgy changed in your church? Do people participate more actively in worship and in the Eucharist?

(3) Ministry

1. Luther emphasized the priesthood of the baptized. Christ alone is high priest, and through baptism believers share his priesthood and kingship (I Peter 2:9). He also emphasized that while all are priests, not all are ministers.

   Do you believe every Christian is called to exercise the calling in their baptism to serve God and their neighbor?

2. In the study document, *The Apostolicity of the Church,* there was a common understanding of the priesthood of the baptized, the divine source of the ordained office of public ministry, the centrality of proclamation of the gospel and administration of the Sacraments.

   Discuss the affirmation that both communions agree that ministry serves the church universal, with Lutherans emphasizing the congregational assembly's direct relation to the church and with Roman Catholics agreeing that bishops, while not over other churches must be "solicitous for the whole church" (paragraph 186) and, thus, that the Bishop of Rome is "pastor of the whole Church."

3. Paragraph 194 shares "Thus, the office of ministry presents both considerable obstacles to common understanding and also hopeful perspectives for rapprochement."

   How can bilateral dialogues bring an affirmation on where there is agreement as well as help resolve any differences?

(4) Scripture and Tradition

1. Luther regarded Scripture as the first principle and ultimate judge of all theological statements. For Luther, Scripture does not oppose all tradition but only "human traditions," that is

traditions that undermine the message of Scripture itself. Since the Reformation, the relationship between Scripture and tradition has changed. Both Catholics and Lutherans have concluded that different emphases in Scripture and tradition do not require maintaining the current division of the churches.

Share some tradition that is important to you and to the Church. Where there are differences, can we respect the understanding of tradition by the other communion?

2. Ecumenical dialogue has emphasized "the efficacy of the Spirit-inspired biblical text" (paragraph 207) as it has operated over time in individuals and in ecclesial tradition and has provided certainty for scriptural revelation.

   What is the work of the Holy Spirit in guiding and enlightening us as we study Scripture and as we look at Tradition in the church?

3. A first step toward consensus in matters of ecclesiology has come with the realization "that the doctrine of justification and the doctrine of the church belong together (paragraph 216) by reciting a common Creed, Lutherans and Catholics place both doctrines in the work of the Trinity. . .

   Why is it helpful to note that Catholics and Lutherans confess together the faith in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church? (Paragraph 218)

Session Seven: Chapter Five

Baptism: The Basis for Unity and Common Commemoration

Read Paragraphs 219 – 222

- Share your experiences of participating in baptisms at your own congregation. Who participated? Within the Eucharistic liturgy or separately? Describe the liturgical actions.

- Share your experiences of being a guest at a baptism performed in a congregation other than your own. (For Catholics, attending a baptism at a Lutheran church; For Lutherans, attending a baptism at a Catholic church.) What was similar to your own tradition? What was different? How were you welcomed or acknowledged as being a fellow member of Christ's body?

- How has your understanding of the origins and histories of Catholic and Lutheran identity changed in your lifetime?

Preparing For Commemoration

Read Paragraphs 223-224

- Share a personal story of living "in divided communities."

- Imagine a shared Catholic – Lutheran commemoration on October 31, 2017. What attitudes might shape such a commemoration? Is there language or terms we would want to avoid?

Shared joy in the gospel

Read Paragraphs 225 – 227

- Share your favorite gospel story.
- Read together the most recent Lutheran and Catholic translations of the Nicene Creed. Are there differences in wording? Why? What are they attempting to say?
- What gifts do Lutherans possess that they want to share with their Catholic siblings?
- How might Catholics acknowledge the validity, virtuous works, and witness to Christ of their "separated brethren" of the Lutheran tradition?

Reasons for regret and lament

Read Paragraphs 228 – 229

- Discuss the Lutheran understanding of "simultaneously saint and sinner" as applied to Martin Luther.

Prayer for Unity

Read Paragraph 230

- Together write a prayer or intercession for unity that is both global in its plea for more visible unity within the body of Christ and also contextual for your particular congregations.
- How might the Confession of St. Peter (January 18) and the Conversion of St. Paul (January 25) provide unique opportunities for Catholic and Lutheran congregations to come together for mutual prayers for unity?

Evaluating the past

Read Paragraphs 231 – 233

- Reflecting upon the cultural and political contexts during the sixteenth century which contributed to the division of the Western Church, identify and discuss similar cultural and political influences which continue to foster division with the one body of Christ.

- What are some theological convictions to which your conscience is bound? How do we treat another sibling in Christ who likewise holds a conscience bound conviction that is contrary to yours? Can we find unity while holding such conflicted convictions?

Catholic confession of sins against unity

Read Paragraphs 234 – 235

- Catholics, as well as Lutherans have spoken and acted grievously against other Christian traditions within the body of Christ. How has each of our traditions treated Eastern Orthodox members of the body of Christ? What do we have to confess together about our deeds and actions against other Christian traditions?

- How can Catholics and Lutherans collaborate to overcome anti-Semitism within our own traditions? How should Christians relate to Jews?

- Discuss your current understating as a Catholic or a Lutheran of the papacy. Can the pope, the bishop of Rome be a sign for unity for Lutherans? How do Catholics respond when some of their bishops take issue with statements by the pope?

Lutheran confession of sins against unity

Read paragraphs 236-237

- Lutherans: share stories about Catholics which you heard from your parents/grandparents and within your congregation that have caused you to have been prejudiced against Catholics? How has your attitude changed? What prejudices do you still hold and need to confess?

- How do Lutherans and Catholics relate to Anabaptists today? What can we learn from these historic "peace churches"?

- The Rev. Lowell G. Almen, Co-Chair of the USA Catholic-Lutheran Dialogue, shared the lengthy history, solid accomplishments and distinguished Lutheran and Catholic theologians of the U.S. Catholic Dialogue at the beginning of this current dialogue round. He outlined six key principles of dialogue:

  1. A genuine, substantive dialogue must be open.
  2. A dialogue must be an honest encounter. Individuals who speak must express clearly what they believe and mean. Participants in a formal dialogue must represent the position of their church as accurately and comprehensively as possible.
  3. A dialogue must be fearless. Each participant must have the courage to change perceptions and perspectives.
  4. A dialogue must imagine possibilities.
  5. Christian charity must prevail.
  6. A capacity for repentance and renewal must be possible.

  How could these principles be helpful for local ongoing ecumenical discussions?

Appendix

Lutheran Catholic Dialogue

The Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue has been in ongoing discussions since 1965. Each "round," or set of discussions, covers a specific topic important for the life and vitality of both communions. Recent rounds have had focused discussions on "The Church as Koinonia of Salvation", "The Hope for Eternal Life", and Ministries of Teaching: Sources, Shapes and Essential Contents (for discerning the truth coming to us in God's Word and communicating this truth in normative teaching for today). In order to harvest the fruits of our dialogue, a Declaration on the Way (to unity) will highlight essential areas of agreement as a foundation for unity.

- Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) - See more at: http://www.elca.org/en/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Bilateral#sthash.sbvdJvPs.dpuf

Documents Produced by the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue in the United States

- The Status of the Nicene Creed as Dogma of the Church (July 7, 1965)
- One Baptism for the Remission of Sins (February 13, 1966)
- The Eucharist (October 1, 1967)
- Eucharist and Ministry (1970)
- Differing Attitudes Toward Papal Primacy (1973)
- Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church (1978)
- Justification by Faith (1983)
- The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary (1990)
- Scripture and Tradition (1995)

- **The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries** (2004)
- **The Hope of Eternal Life** (November 1, 2010)

For Additional Information

Please consult the ecumenical and interreligious websites of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' beliefs and teaching (See below)

- http://www.elca.org/en/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Bilateral#sthash.sbvdJvPs.dpuf

- http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/lutheran/lutheran-documents.cfm

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