"Feed My Lambs" Introduction: The Church's Care for the Needy

A Bible study prepared by the Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Introduction

1. What do the following verses mean for Christians? (Move through them quickly. Don't worry about giving profound answers!)

Luke 6:36 "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."

1 Cor. 3:16 "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"

Luke 17:21 "Behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

2 Cor. 8:7 "But as you excel in everything — in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you — see that you excel in this act of grace also."

2. Question: When your group responded to question No. 1, did you respond as individual Christians or as "the Church" — that is, as *Christians who are part of a larger body*? Or both? How might these verses take on a different nuance of meaning if we realize that in all of them, "you" is actually used as a plural? Who *is* the plural "you"?

The Church is many individuals, united through Christ into one body.

- 1. A famous teacher, Friedrich Schleiermacher, asserted that the Church is merely the result of like-minded individuals who, by an act of their free will, decide to associate with one another. This idea centers upon individuals and their choices. Is this consistent with the biblical view of the Church? Respond to the following passages.
 - Read Eph. 2:1–5, John 15:16 and Rom. 1:16. Does the Church come about through "free will" as some sort of voluntary human organization?
 - When we are baptized, we come into a relationship with Christ. "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith" (Gal. 3:26. Note the plural!) "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3. Note the plural again.) Who is the one acting in Baptism? (Note that "baptized" is passive!) Read Titus 3:4–7. Is Baptism the Gospel?

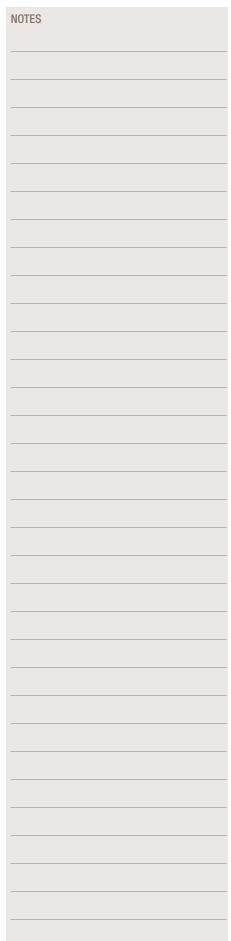


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-	According to 1 Cor. 10:16–17, who and/or what make the Church
	"one body"?

- 2. The Church is Christ's creation. He brings it about and sustains it through the forgiveness delivered in the Gospel proclaimed (Rom. 1:16), through Holy Baptism (Titus 3) and through the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 10:16–17). When Christ walked the byways of ancient Palestine, He constantly demonstrated love by both Word (the Gospel!) and deed. What do the following verses indicate about the origin, cause and continuing motivation of the Church for caring for other members of the body of Christ?
 - 1 John 3:16-18
 - Rom. 7:5–6 (Note the connection to the language of "death" of Rom. 6:1 ff.!)
 - Look at Titus 3:4–7 again. How is verse 8 related to the preceding four verses?
 - Compare 1 Cor. 12:12-14 with 1 Cor. 12:25–26 (and note which famous chapter follows chapter 12!)
 - Compare 1 Cor. 10:16-17 with 1 Cor. 12:25–26.
- 3. Martin Luther had a profound understanding of the Church's corporate life of mercy, based directly upon 1 Cor. 10–11. Please read and briefly discuss what Luther says regarding the Lord's Supper and its ramifications for the life of the Church (*see margin note*). Note that Luther's understanding encompasses both the local and worldwide Church!

There your heart must go out in love and devotion and learn that this sacrament is a sacrament of love, and that love and service are given you and you again must render love and service to Christ and His needy ones. You must feel with sorrow all the dishonor done to Christ in His holy Word, all the misery of Christendom, all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing: You must fight, work, pray and, if you cannot do more, have heartfelt sympathy. That is bearing in your turn the misfortune and adversity of Christ and His saints. ... He said "This is my body ..." As though he said: I am the head, I will first give myself for you, will make your suffering and misfortune Mine own and bear it for you, that you in your turn may do the same for Me and for one another, have all things in common in Me and with Me and let this sacrament be unto you a sure token of this all, that you may not forget Me, but daily call to mind and admonish one another by what I have done for you and still am doing, that you may be strengthened thereby and also bear with one another (Luther, The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, against the Brotherhoods, Luther's Works 35, Page 54).



Sharing the Gospel and serving others — within the Church and beyond

- 1. Read Luke 17:11–17, Matt. 28:19 and Gal. 6:10. Did Christ limit His proclamation of the Gospel or His care for those in need, to Israelites (i.e., to members of the "true Church")?
- 2. From verses like Gal. 6:10, we see a clear primary responsibility of Christians to care for other Christians, but then to also care for those beyond the fold. Which of the following statements would best express the reason Christians "do good to all …"?
 - We provide physical care in order to attract people for the real task of evangelism (See James 2:14ff).
 - If we provide physical care, there is no need to evangelize (Matt. 16:26).
 - Jesus loved people body and soul. We do well to love our neighbor, Christian or not, with our words (the Gospel!) and our deeds.
- 3. According to what the Augsburg Confession says (rightly), what belongs to the essence of the Church?

It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel Article VII (Martin Luther, Formula of Concord, Augsburg Confession VII, Tappert, Page 32)

- 4. While good works and charity are not the essence of the Church (i.e., they don't create or sustain the Church in faith), what is indicated if they are absent in the Church's life? See Matt. 25:34-46 (*Note: The "righteous" did not earn heaven. In fact, they are not even aware of their good deeds, much less fixated upon them for gaining eternal life. Verse 37*). See also James 2:14–17.
- 5. Answer the following questions regarding Acts 6. Note that what is translated "daily distribution of bread" actually says only "daily *diakonia*" or "daily service." "*Diakonia*" (Dee-a-ko-NEE-a) is a wonderful word still used by most churches in the world to describe what we Americans have called "social ministry."
 - What was the need expressed in this chapter?
 - Would it be fair to say that "the apostles cared about preaching the Word, not about care for the needy?
 - Was the need to be met by individuals acting alone, or did the Church act as "the Church" to address the need?
 - What needs do the members of your congregation and community face?
 - How does your congregation address local physical need? Through a deaconess? Social ministry committee? Connection with a nursing home or social ministry organization? Neighborhood renewal? Care

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"Feed My Lambs" Introduction

for the elderly? Food pantry? Counseling? Help for unwed mothers? Housing for retired church workers? Care for the disabled? Care for young families? Men's/women's groups?

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6. Does the local Church have an obligation of love for people suffering elsewhere in the world? The question might seem rhetorical, but nonetheless, it is very significant: Is the "body of Christ" limited by space or time? So what does this mean for us as we hear about struggles and needs of Christians, particularly Lutheran Christians, elsewhere in the world?

Overflowing with expressions of thanksgiving

- 1. Please read 2 Cor. 8 and 9. Did you realize that Paul's collection for the Church suffering in Jerusalem was in many ways the foundation for his third missionary journey? Consider how very important the concern of the Gentile mission churches was for the Jewish mother church! After all, the controversy over whether or not Gentile Christians needed to follow Jewish law in order to be Christians could have irreparably damaged the apostolic church! (See Acts 15).
 - Who does Paul say has given so generously (8:1)?
 - Were the givers wealthy (8:2)? Are *we* wealthy? (Consider the fact that in some places in West Africa, for instance, the per capita income is about \$80 per year.)
 - Verses 3 and 4 say, "For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints. The original says "the *koinonia* of this *diakonia*." "*Koinonia*" means "participation," even "communion," and is used by Paul for the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 10:16–17. This harkens back to the Luther passage shared earlier. Of what significance is it that the same word is used for both the Lord's Supper and charitable gifts?
 - Should ministers of the Church avoid asking for or encouraging congregations to provide funds for legitimate needs (8:6 and 8:16-19)?
 - What's the proper motive for giving compulsion (8:8) or the Gospel (8:9)?
 - How much should be given by the individual? What's the acceptable amount (8:3; 8:12)?
 - When the Church does give gifts for the needs of others, with what care should the funds be administered (8:19–24)?
 - When one congregation or "district" is moved to give to those in need, what is the result among others (9:1–2)?
 - Should a congregation's gifts for the needy in other parts of the world be planned or haphazard (9:4–5)?
 - We are prone to believe that when we give generously, what we have will be markedly decreased to our own personal and congregational detriment. How does Paul view giving differently?

- Would you agree that the healthiest congregations and districts are those that are not only tending to and addressing their own internal needs, but have an eye turned outward, toward those around them, well beyond their own borders?
- Paul says (9:11) there are two results to the generosity of the congregation at Corinth. First, he says, "You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way." What is the second result?
- Paul is very specific about this "thanksgiving." When we give to charities, more often than not, we simply provide a few dollars, think well of ourselves and forget the deed. Something much more profound occurs, however, when Christians, particularly churches, provide for the needs of others, while clearly confessing Christ and the reason for their kindness (the Gospel!). According to Paul, much more than the provision of need is taking place. Whom does such giving benefit (9:12–15)?
- Do you find in this passage (9:13) good cause to assist non-Christians as well as Christians?
- 2. Is it fair to say that in chapters 8–9 of 2 Corinthians, a real corporate, churchly life of mercy is described? After all, Paul asks for the gifts. Titus and other church officials encourage and manage the giving process. Individual gifts are collected by congregations. Congregational gifts are contributed with regional offerings. Paul and church officials take the gifts to Jerusalem. The gifts are handed over to the church officials in Jerusalem.

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A concluding note on LCMS mercy work

Dear Friends in Christ!

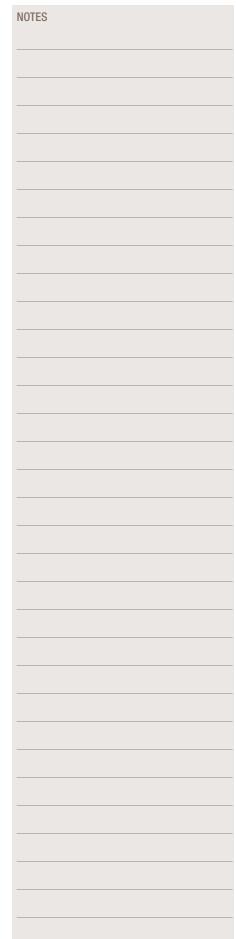
Thank you so very much for participating in the ministry of the LCMS. The negative aspects of the Church's life often grab the headlines, but I'm here to tell you that the "Good News" truly outweighs the bad!

Because of your generous gifts, millions of dollars of assistance are provided for needy people all over the world. We and our partners work especially to allow local individuals and peoples to grow their strengths and become self-sufficient. We are able to provide millions of dollars of support to LCMS mission efforts around the world, so that missionaries and missionary communities can address pressing human needs in the clear name of Jesus. We are able to provide assistance to LCMS partner churches to increase their capacity to address the needs of their own people, body and soul. As conservative Lutherans, we also have the privilege of providing dollars to our partners. The LCMS plays its part with other Lutherans and Christians around the world in addressing human need, particularly in times of international disasters. Let it never be said that the LCMS won't cooperate with any other churches. We do this, and we do it faithfully in accord with LCMS teaching.

All of this happens only through the generous gifts of individual donors like you and through gifts of congregations. Through you, and only through you, the LCMS is able to carry on a 2 Cor. 8–9 ministry *today*.

God bless you! Thank you! Please visit our website, *lcms.org*.

Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison President The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



"Feed My Lambs" Session One

Session goal: Explore how as individual members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12), we show love and compassion to people in need whom God has set before us. We practice deeds of mercy, both planned and unplanned, to bring hope and encouragement to others and to bring honor and praise to the God whose love motivates us to show love to others.

Kindness: How "Random" Can it Be?

Perhaps you have seen the message in a public service advertisement or on a bumper sticker: "Practice Random Acts of Kindness." This is an idea that has appeal for us as individuals. We seldom form groups and elaborate plans to perform random acts. You and I help fix a flat tire, reunite a lost child in a department store with his parents or carry a neighbor's grocery bag that was one-too-many because those are needs that often occur when we are by ourselves — and needs to which we can respond as individuals.

What do you think of when you imagine yourself performing a "random act of kindness"? Do you see yourself in the stereotypical "Boy Scout" role, helping a little old lady across the street? Do you see yourself being called upon to respond to an emergency situation?

Large or small, our acts of mercy flow from our living faith in Christ. We respond to His love for us by acting in love and compassion toward others.

List one or more ordinary acts of kindness you have done in your station in life. If it's helpful to your study, group members may wish to share their experiences.

An Unplanned — and Uncharacteristic — Act of Kindness THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Read Luke 10:25-37.

- 1. Was the act of kindness a "random act"? Discuss. What excuses might have been offered to avoid acting?
- 2. What was the flaw in the young expert in the Law's understanding of the Law specifically the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself?
- 3. An act of compassion responds to a need. Discuss how the story of the Good Samaritan effectively illustrates this.



LUTHER: FAITH DOESN'T ASK IF GOOD WORKS ARE TO BE DONE. Faith is a divine work in us that transforms us and begets us anew from God, kills the Old Adam, makes us entirely different people in heart, spirit, mind, and all our powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it.

Oh, faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, so that it is impossible for it not to be constantly doing what is good. Likewise faith does not ask if good works are to be done, but before one can ask, faith has already done them and is constantly active ... Faith is a vital, deliberate trust in God's grace, so certain that it would die a thousand times for it. And such confidence and knowledge of divine grace makes us joyous, mettlesome, and merry toward God and all creatures (Martin Luther, *Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration*, IV. 10f., Tappert, Pages 552-53).

LUTHER: BAPTISM, "STATION" AND "ORDINARY ACTS OF KINDNESS"

God has given every saint a special way and a special grace by which to live according to his baptism. But baptism and its significance He has set as a common standard for all men, so that every man is to examine himself according to his station in life, to find what is the best way for him to fulfil the work and purpose of his baptism... (*Treatise on Baptism*, 1519).

Whose Need is Met? THE OUTCOMES OF COMPASSIONATE ACTS

Read Matt. 6:1-4.

- 1. It feels good to be recognized for the acts of kindness we do. What are the dangers in doing good for the sake of recognition? Who is to receive praise and honor for our acts of kindness?
- 2. It feels good just to be able to do something compassionate for someone else. Is there also a danger in doing acts of kindness for the way they make us feel? Is it ever possible to the have the wrong motivation in our desire to do the "right thing"? How might Paul answer this question? (See Romans 7:21ff.)
- 3. What comfort do you find in this statement by Luther? "The sin which remains after baptism makes it impossible for any good works to be pure before God. For this reason we must hold boldly and fearlessly to our baptism, and hold it up against all sins and terrors of conscience, and humbly say, 'I know full well that I have not a single work which is pure, but I am baptized, and through my baptism God, Who cannot lie, has bound Himself in a covenant with me, not to count my sin against me, but to slay it and blot it out" (Treatise on Baptism).
- 4. How does God respond to acts of kindness done in secret?

Faith — Compassion's Heart and Soul

Read Matt. 25:31–40.

- 1. Does this passage promise that salvation can be achieved through acts of kindness? If not, why not?
- 2. What evidence suggests that those who performed acts of kindness were unaware of the consequences of their actions (or were not doing them for personal recognition)?
- 3. How does this passage illustrate the relationship between faith and works of kindness?

Bearing Each Other's Burdens

Read Gal. 6:1–2. Within the family of faith in Christ, the Church, special deeds of compassion are possible. What burdens might be referred to in this passage? What can we do to aid our fellow believer? Why?

Prayer Thoughts

Suggestions for prayer: that God will grant His grace and mercy to empower us to seek to serve others in love; that God will continue to present opportunities to help others in need; that God will grant wisdom and guidance to determine the most appropriate ways to help others; and that God will use us according to His will, helping others in ways we may never realize or understand.

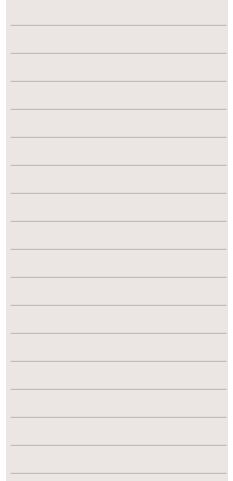
LUTHER: THE LORD'S SUPPER AS SOURCE AND STRENGTH OF LOVE FOR OUR NEIGHBOR

There are those, indeed, who would share the benefits but not the cost, that is, who gladly hear in this sacrament that the help, fellowship and assistance of all the saints are promised and given to them, but who, because they fear the world, are unwilling in their turn to contribute to this fellowship, to help the poor, to endure sins, to care for the sick, to suffer with the suffering, to intercede for others, to defend the truth, to seek the reformation of the church and of all Christians at the risk of life, property and honor. ... They are self-seeking persons whom this sacrament does not benefit. Just as we could not endure a citizen who wanted to be helped, protected and made free by the community, and yet in how turn would do nothing for it nor serve it. No, we on our part must make others' evil our own, if we desire Christ and His saints to make our evil their own; then will the fellowship be compete and justice be done to the sacrament. For the sacrament has no blessing and significance unless love grows daily and so changes a man that he is made one with

all others (Treatise on the Blessed Sacrament,

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1519).



"Feed My Lambs" Session Two

Session goal: Explore how as the body of Christ, i.e., congregations and other Christian entities, we demonstrate love and compassion to those in need. Explore how we share God's love through emergency response in the United States and abroad, as well as through intentional efforts to reach into communities, both domestic and international, to help people improve their standard of living.

Many Members, One Body

ACTING TOGETHER FOR GOOD

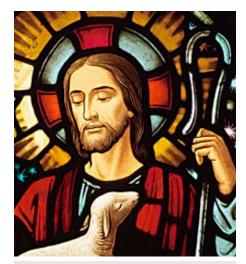
One of the privileges with which God has blessed the Church is that of caring for people in need. The Church may respond to need in the same way an individual might — alleviating the suffering of one person or family in a single situation or providing funds for emergency supplies in a disaster. But the Church also is equipped to respond to ongoing or chronic needs. Congregations and faith groups bring comfort and hope to countless struggling people by offering a variety of programs, including:

- Counseling
- Housing/shelter
- Food pantries
- Literacy/English as a Second Language
- Job skills
- Immigrant/refugee resettlement

The list is long and illustrates how fervently the Lutheran church has embraced its long tradition of seeing to the needs of those in distress.

Your Plenty Will Supply What They Need Read 2 Cor. 8:1-14.

- Why does Paul tell the Corinthians about the generosity of the Macedonian churches? Discuss other scriptural examples of sacrificial giving. What does I John 3:16–17 say is the motivation for such giving?
- 2. What was the attitude of the Macedonian churches toward "sharing in the service to the saints" (verse 4)? What is our attitude? A Christian care organization often uses the slogan, "Live simply, so that others may simply live." How is this idea related to our attitude toward giving?
- 3. What does it mean for the churches to have given "themselves first" (verse 5)? How can that be done?
- 4. What does it mean to "excel in the grace of giving" (verse 7)?



LUTHER: AS ONE BODY, THE CHURCH ACTS IN LOVE.

On the basis of 1 Cor. 10:16-17 ("Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body..."), Martin Luther saw a most profound reason for such acts of mercy in, by and for members of the church as "one body." ... The blessing of the sacrament is fellowship and love, by which we are strengthened against death and all evil. This fellowship is twofold: on the one hand we partake of Christ and all saints, on the other hand we permit all Christians to be partakers of us, in whatever way they and we are able; so that by this sacrament all self-seeking love is uprooted and gives place to love which seeks the common good of all, and through this mutual love there is one bread, one drink, one body, one community, that is the true union of Christian brethren (Treatise on the Blessed Sacrament, 1519).

5. How important is it for a person to follow through on his or her desire to help (see verses 10–12)?

Read Rom. 15:23-28.

- 6. The congregations in Macedonia and Achaia provided gifts that Paul was planning to take to Jerusalem to help the poor there. How do congregations make use of agencies to distribute aid to people in need outside their communities?
- 7. Is there a connection between spiritual gifts and material giving (See Rom. 12:3-8)? Explain.

Whose Need is Met?

Paul relates to the church at Corinth that the Macedonians pleaded urgently for the "privilege of sharing in the service of the saints." As Spirit-motivated servants of Christ, we have a desire — a need — to share God's love through kindness to others. In fact, it has been said that our need to give is far greater than God's need to receive.

Arriving in a poor farming community high in the Andes Mountains, a visitor was excited to see a powerful North American-made tractor parked beside the farmers' meeting place. He learned it had been donated by a group in the United States. He also learned that the village's farmers were unable to put it to practical use. They explained that this generous and well-intentioned gift was destructive to the fragile topsoil of the *altiplano*; furthermore, they couldn't afford the fuel to operate it.

- 1. Whose need was met in the giving of the tractor? Suggest alternatives that might meet both needs of giver and receiver more efficiently.
- 2. Many U.S. congregations enjoy planning mission trips in which a group of members travel to a foreign mission site and help build, plant or provide health services. The people served often value these visits because they give tangible evidence of the U.S. congregation's concern for them. Discuss the needs that such a mission trip is designed to meet. What are potential drawbacks to a mission trip such as this? (What might large shipments of clothing do to local clothing manufacturing company, for instance?) How does our desire to be good stewards influence our desire to help those in need?

Prayer Thoughts

Suggestions for prayer: that God will continue to make us evermore what He has declared us to be, as the body of Christ; that God will foster unity in our churches and Lutheran organizations; that as the body of Christ we use our resources to reflect the love and compassion of our Lord; and that our efforts to help others will be sincere and be pleasing to Him, forgiven of any sin and all sin which accompanies them.

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"Feed My Lambs" Session Three

Session goal: Explore how, as the body of Christ, i.e., congregations and Christian organizations, we demonstrate love and compassion to those in need, i.e., "how we live in our neighbor through love," at times addressing the needs of great numbers of people, e.g., survivors of natural disasters, epidemics or famine and frequently addressing long-term systemic conditions in addition to emergency needs.

Compassion for the Multitudes

"YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT."

Sometimes need is experienced on an overwhelming scale. Entire nations live in the grip of poverty and starvation. Famine and war sometimes drive millions from their homes in search of refuge in neighboring countries. Deadly epidemics decimate whole segments of populations. In an instant, an earthquake or flood can take hundreds of lives and leave thousands of people without food, water and shelter. How can we make a difference? Read Luke 9:10–17.

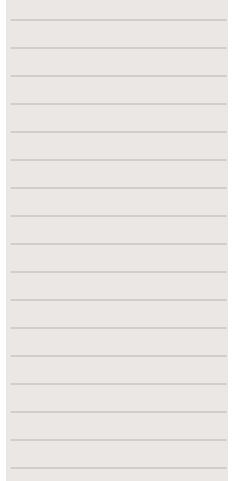
- 1. How did Jesus respond when He and the disciples saw that the crowds had followed them to Bethsaida? (See also Matt. 14:14 and Mark 6:34.)
- 2. The disciples saw a potential problem as the end of the day approached. What did they propose in order to avert trouble for Jesus and themselves? From their perspective, how did Jesus' compassion compound the problem?
- 3. Consider crises involving large numbers of people for example, the 12 million African children orphaned by HIV/AIDS or the 3–5 million people forced by drought and conflict to flee their homes in Afghanistan for Pakistan and Iran. In the face of large-scale need, do we tend to think like Jesus (*"You give them something to eat."*) or like the disciples (*"We have only five loaves of bread and two fish!"*). Why?
- 4. What lesson in disaster response can we find in Jesus' direction to the disciples, verses 15–17 (consider the factors: available resources, prayer, God's role in the response and *having baskets ready*)?
- 5. The poor typically suffer the most severe effects of natural disasters. This is true largely because they are forced to live in the least desirable areas and receive little support from their governments in mitigating the conditions that put them at risk. It also is true in part because they have few voices to speak for them. What role should Christians play in influencing governments to consider the safety, health and well-being of the poor in their country and others?



LUTHER: AS ONE BODY, THE CHURCH ACTS IN LOVE. Martin Luther said, "...a Christian man lives not in himself, but in Christ and his neighbor.

Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love; by faith he is caught up beyond himself into God, by love he sinks down beneath himself into his neighbor; yet he always remains in God and in His love" (*Treatise on Christian Liberty*, 1520).

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Reconsidering Available Resources

God still provides us with ways to multiply our resources when we respond to need. Networks of organizations and agencies exist to assist us in sharing what we have with those who need it most. To help people deal with emergencies and long-term needs, the LCMS works through the following:

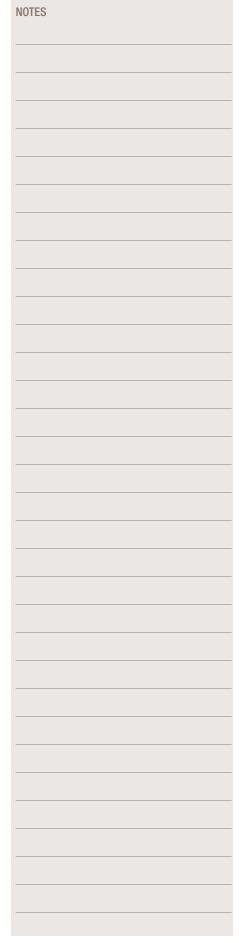
- LCMS missionaries In countries with an LCMS missionary presence, the LCMS works through these missionaries to bring comfort in times of disaster and enable communities to achieve selfsufficiency. In this work there is the most direct connection between works of mercy and proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- National Lutheran churches The LCMS also responds to disaster and offers self-help assistance through national churches that are partners of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Other domestic disaster relief organizations with which the LCMS has established formal or informal working relationships include: the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the American Red Cross.

What are the advantages of working through other agencies whose interests and vision are similar to ours? Is it wrong for a Christian individual or a church to give dollars to secular efforts to alleviate suffering? What percentages of aid dollars ought to be given specifically to LCMS relief efforts? Broader Lutheran or secular efforts?

Prayer Thoughts

Suggestions for prayer: that God would provide for the needs of those who are right now suffering the effects of disaster; that God would provide resources sufficient to meet the needs of disaster survivors; and thank God for safety; for opportunities to serve others when they need help; and for people with willing hearts to serve us when we are in need.



"Feed My Lambs" Session Four

Session goal: Explore how as members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12), we show love and compassion to people in need as an expression of faith in Christ's mercy, and look for opportunities to **proclaim** the love of Jesus Christ as well as demonstrate it — by sharing the saving message of the Gospel.

Whole-Person Ministry

We can find no better model for responding to both people's physical and spiritual needs than our Lord Himself. Matthew reports that early in His ministry "... he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people" (4:23). List instances you can think of in the Gospels that show how Jesus coupled preaching and teaching with healing or with providing food or income.

People who need to hear the Good News of God's grace in Jesus Christ also live in a physical world and have real physical and economic needs. Jesus' attention to the hunger, sickness, poverty and other struggles of the many who came to hear Him demonstrates His care for them in the physical sense. His words in Matthew 25, "... as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me," encourage us to live our faith not only by making disciples, but also by sharing what we have with those who have less.

When we care for the whole person, physical and spiritual, as Jesus did repeatedly, we refer to the ministry as "holistic." In addition to our desire to follow the model of Christ, what are some reasons we offer holistic care — physical care and spiritual care together?

Seeing is Believing

Opening the eyes of a man born blind Read John 9:1-17.

- In this portion of John's story of the man born blind, what is Jesus doing — preaching or healing? Defend your response.
- 2. Compare the disciples' questions about the nature of the man's blindness with Jesus' explanation for it. Do we ever find ourselves debating the causes of people's needs while the needs go unmet?
- 3. Discuss the reactions of the various witnesses to this event the neighbors, the Pharisees and the blind man himself.

Read John 9:18-34.



THE SMALCALD ARTICLES (an official public confession of the Lutheran church) "The church cannot be better governed and maintained than by having all of us live under one head, Christ ... diligently joined together in unity in doctrine, faith, sacraments and works of love" (II.4.9. Tappert, Page 300).

MARTIN LUTHER: SO THAT THE EVILS OF THE PRESENT MIGHT BE SOMEWHAT LESSENED Luther wrote to the Duke of Saxony, when the latter was suffering illness. For Luther, as for Jesus, physical healing and spiritual consolation belonged together:

Our Lord and Savior Jesus has left us a commandment which applies equally to all Christians, namely, that we are to render humanitarian services, or rather (as Scriptures call them), the words of mercy [Luke 6:36] to those who are afflicted and in a state of calamity, and that we are visit the sick, try to free the captives, and do similar things for our neighbor so that the evils of the present may be somewhat lessened. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself gave us the brightest example of this commandment when, because of his infinite love for the race of men, he descended from the bosom of the Father into our misery and our prison, that is, into our flesh and our most wretched life, and took upon himself the penalty for our sins so that we might be saved ... And while we have the duty to visit and console all who are afflicted with sickness, we are especially obligated those of the household of faith (Fourteen Consolations, Luther's Works 42:122).

4. The man to whom Jesus gave the gift of sight is questioned by the Pharisees. During the interview, he displays frustration and even some irony. What issues seem to have the most significance for the Pharisees? For the man who had been blind? Discuss "blindness" in the context of this passage.

Read John 9:35-41.

Bread King? Rice Christians?

THE OUTCOME OF OUR ACTIONS

Even acts of kindness can be misunderstood. Jesus fed more than 5,000 people out of His compassion for them (Matt. 14:14) but then had to escape the crowd because they began to consider the miracle a reason to make Him a king by force. He had not come to be a "bread king."

One unintended result of offering physical care along with the Gospel is what some people call "Rice Christianity." The term was born out of the frustration of early missionaries to China and India who distributed food or provided other services as part of their ministry. Some people didn't seem to mind sitting through a sermon — or even accepting Baptism and claiming to be Christian — if they knew their physical hunger or other needs would be satisfied in the end.

- 1. Should we insist that recipients of our acts of kindness be Christian (or Lutheran) or at least be willing to listen to the Gospel message? Share your thoughts.
- 2. Missionaries relate that people they have served often ask, "Why have you done this for us?" They answer that the love of Jesus motivates them to help others. Ideally, the next question will be, "Who is this Jesus?" What is the best way to provide physical help and spiritual care and yet avoid creating "Rice Christians"?

A related unintended result of holistic ministry is dependency.

Occasionally the recipients of physical care end up relying entirely on the help they receive from a ministry or other organization.

3. A well-known proverb advises that to give a man a fish is to feed him for a day, but to teach him to fish is to feed him for a lifetime. This is one of the principles behind a relief and development concept called *accompaniment* (which involves being present, building relationships and "walking alongside" recipients of help). How can we avoid fostering dependency and instead give real help that leads to self-sufficiency?

Prayer Thoughts

Suggestions for prayer: that God will continue to reveal opportunities to help others and to make disciples; and that God will keep us in His Word and send His Spirit to guide and comfort us.
