



*A four-session
small group
study for growing
disciples*



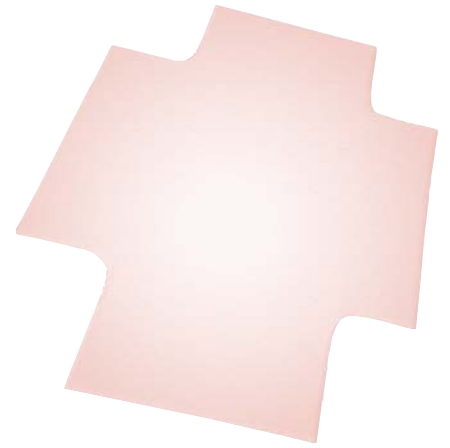
WORSHIP

Living Faith in Daily Life

a small group Bible study on devotion and public worship

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WORSHIP

Living Faith in Daily Life

A small group study on devotion and public worship

Worship is a mark of discipleship. It is one of the seven faith practices highlighted in the ELCA-wide *Call to Discipleship*.

O come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land which his hands have formed.
O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker!
For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

—Psalm 95:1-7



Writer: Barbara Berry-Bailey
Editors: Diane Monroe, Ted Schroeder
Designer: Sharon Schuster

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Produced by the Christian Education team of the Division for Congregational Ministries. Multiple copies of this resource can be ordered by calling Augsburg Fortress, 800/328-4648 and asking for item code 6-0001-6916-7 \$1.25 each, plus shipping.

This resource and further support materials are available at www.elca.org/dcm/christian_education/resources

How to use this study

This course will work best in a small group of five to twelve people. Though shared leadership will provide a greater range of perspective, a single leader can also serve the group. The suggested length of each session is 90 minutes.

You will find a variety of helps on worship available from the Division for Congregational Ministries worship team at www.elca.org/dcm/worship and at www.augsburgfortress.org. Use these to prepare to lead this study or to enrich the study and to deal with questions that might arise during your discussion.

Recommended resources are found at the end of the study. Suggestions for the leader are found in small boxes throughout this resource.

The goal for this study is to provide an open learning environment through which each participant can deepen his/her worship life. Each session is divided into three sections.

Gathering

A time to focus on who we are, whose we are, and where we are. The exercises lay the groundwork for sharing and understanding the theme. Allow significant time for laughter and genuine community building.

Growing

A time to reflect on the Bible stories and maintain a personal journal.

Going

A time to examine one's worship experience and explore communicating that experience to others.



Advance preparation

To facilitate a successful small group experience, attend to the following needs in advance of the first session:

- Order a copy of this study, *Worship: Living Faith in Daily Life*, for each participant. (6-0001-6916-7, \$1.25 each, plus shipping.)
- Provide a small notebook for the personal reflections and journal exercises. Remember extra pencils, pens, and Bibles.
- Review this study in advance of the group's gathering to determine which resources to have on hand for each session.
- Plan for refreshments.



Session 1

Come, Let Us Worship: Biblical foundation for worship

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Make sure all feel welcome and are comfortable as the study begins. Take a few moments for introductions. Encourage each person in turn to respond to one of the following discussion starters. You might start with your own sharing.

1. Share your earliest memory of worship. What did you see, hear, touch, and smell? Who was with you?
2. Share why that worship experience or others have made such a lasting impression on you.

Let's Pray

Begin with prayer. Read the following aloud or speak a prayer of your choosing.

Lord God, we give you thanks for all your blessings, the precious gift of life, the world, and everything in it. Surround us with your Holy Spirit and guide us that we may be drawn closer to you through worship of you. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the following aloud.

"I always feel better when I go to church," admits Chris. "I pray at home and listen to Christian music and sometimes sing along. I feel good when I am a part of that. But I feel different, better when I go to church and do those same things. Why is that, Pastor?"

There is a difference between private devotions and worshipping God in the assembly. I have believed this since I was a child, but only when put on the spot did I ever consider why.

Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there" (Matthew 18:20). We also know that God hears our prayers wherever we may be and regardless of whom we are with. So, why do we get a "different, better" feeling in corporate worship?

In the quiet pre-dawn stillness, we may hear the still small voice of God calling, answering, comforting. That is why some prefer to come into the sanctuary before worship begins and simply sit in silence. However, the gathered people of God in Christ Jesus has a power that goes far beyond the silent reflection of the one person. Through the passing of the peace, we are reminded that while blessings come from God, they come to us through others. The covenantal relationship with God has two dimensions – horizontal and vertical – that is, with God, as well as with the community of believers.

How is your relationship with God and with others reflected, strengthened, and lived out in worship? Talk about the question.

Bible Focus

Exodus 3:9-12, 19:2b-6, and 20:8-10

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the Scripture text and the following aloud. Discuss questions and reactions as they arise.

God's identity becomes clear to Moses as he comes back to worship God at the same place from which God called him. The Lord's presence is evident to all the people Israel when Moses brings God's command, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

Martin Luther's explanation in the *Small Catechism* deals primarily with hearing the Word of God and keeping it. But the *Large Catechism* gives a deeper understanding:

...we observe them (days of rest) so that people will have time and opportunity on such days of rest, which otherwise would not be available, to attend worship services, that is, so that they may assemble to hear and discuss God's Word and then to offer praise, song and prayer to God.

—From The Large Catechism, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, © 2000 Augsburg Fortress.



Discuss the following questions.

1. How does our relationship with God connect us to the Christian community?
2. What does it mean to you to “remember the Sabbath day”?
3. What is the value of private, devotional worship for you? How does it compare to or relate to worship in the community?

JOURNAL TIME

Journal work may be started during class time and completed later at home.

The earliest occurrence of the Hebrew word for “worship” is in Genesis 22:5, in the story of Abraham’s near sacrifice of Isaac. Certainly the Bible records earlier images of one-on-one conversations with God, but the word “worship” is first used when there are two people gathered. In this instance, though the circumstance initially appears to be one of dread, it becomes one of praise and thanksgiving for what God has done.

People who are aware of their relationship with God have always felt the need to respond to God’s love and mercy, whether through prayer, or song or some other act of devotion. When we speak of worship, we mean the assembly of the people of God in communal prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, guided by God’s Holy Word and Sacraments.

Think of the various worship experiences you have had. Though we understand worship as our response to God’s unconditional love, reflect on what specifically motivates your worship of God. Keep a journal record of your experiences in public and private worship during the coming week. What can you learn from your reflections about the place of worship in your life?

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you experience your next worship opportunity with new eyes and new ears. Let the Sunday Bible passages, songs, and prayers guide your one-on-one time with God.

Going

Final Thoughts

Read the following aloud and discuss as time permits.

Remember, though there is a prescribed time for the assembly of the people of God, both private and public worship equips us for our ministry in daily life. Reflect on how worship is carried into daily living and how prayer and praise happen throughout your life and the life of others in your congregation. Share some of these reflections.

Encourage all to complete the Small Group Covenant. Suggest that participants read the covenant and sign it prayerfully. The covenant is meant to be a statement of intention, seeking God’s blessing.

Small Group Covenant

1. I commit to being a part of this group for each of our meetings.
2. I will pray each day for each small group member by name.
3. I will treat all that is shared in the group as confidential.
4. I will invest time each week to pray, reflect, and write on the “journal time” text.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray, or ask a volunteer to pray, the following prayer aloud or speak another prayer of your choosing.

Lord God, we give you thanks and praise for the gift of congregation—your people called, enlightened, and sanctified by the work of the Spirit. Help us in our understanding of all Christ has done that we may worship you wholeheartedly. Keep us focused on love and service to you, through love and service to all. Amen.

Session 2

Liturgy: The Way We Do the Things We Do

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Make sure all feel welcome and are comfortable as the session begins. Take a few moments for participants to share some of their worship experiences during the past week or some of their journal entries.

Let's Pray

Begin with prayer. Read the following aloud or speak a prayer of your choosing.

Lord, we give thanks and praise for the privilege of this holy place in which to worship you. Make us good stewards, and continue to guide us with your Holy Spirit, so that all that we do will glorify and honor you. Amen.

Encourage each in turn to respond to the following discussion starters. You might start with your own sharing.

When Christianity was illegal, Christians gathered secretly, in ways that would not draw attention to their worship. After Christianity became the accepted religion of the state, the manner in which people gathered for worship was as ear and eye-catching as the places in which they gathered. While an informal, loosely structured assembly served the purpose for hidden clusters of Jesus' followers, regular, corporate worship for large groups required more systematic planning.

The word "liturgy" comes from the Greek word meaning "work of the people." It is the order by which we do things, when we gather to worship.

Read through and discuss the components of the Lutheran liturgy found on page 7. Talk about the value of the various elements.

You may want also want to refer to The Lutheran Book of Worship, With One Voice or This Far by Faith. See the discussion of the biblical roots of the liturgy at www.elca.org/dcm/worship/faq/liturgy/biblical_roots.html

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the following aloud.

"Pastor, I really enjoy the way we worship, but there is something I don't understand. Why do we do the same thing every week? Can't we do something to change things sometimes?"

"I am in my 80s and was raised in the Lutheran church, but I have not attended since The Passing Of the Peace was added. I believe the worship service should be an experience of reverence and prayer to our Lord, and not interrupted with conversation. Unless we go back to the previous way, I cannot attend."

These comments express some of the differing views of corporate worship. Worship is somewhat like ballroom dancing; you cannot do it alone. For that reason, each group of worshipers must come to some agreement on how they will move in order to move together.

Our liturgy has been handed down through the centuries, with some minor changes over time. But when we come together to worship, every movement has a meaning and that meaning has not changed over the centuries. There are still ritual procedures for gathering, hearing the word, sharing the meal and being sent out. We do these things in the twenty-first century for the same reasons they were done in the third century.

Talk about the value of using a liturgy in worship for you. For your congregation? What are your experiences with both liturgical and non-liturgical worship? How do those compare for you? Share some of your reflections.

The Structure of the Liturgy: Gathering, Word, Meal, Sending

Below are examples of how the liturgy can be molded, with integrity, for specific circumstances. These are not the only possibilities. Depending on the situation, the items in parentheses could be eliminated.

Weekdays/Spoken <i>(with hymns)</i>	Sundays after Epiphany or Pentecost	Sundays in Advent, Lent	Festivals (including the Twelve Days of Christmas and all the Sundays of Easter)
Gathering (Confession & Forgiveness) (Entrance Hymn) Greeting & Prayer of the Day	Gathering (Confession & Forgiveness) Entrance Hymn Greeting & Prayer of the Day	Gathering Confession & Forgiveness Entrance Hymn Greeting Kyrie Prayer of the Day	Gathering Entrance Hymn Greeting Kyrie Hymn of Praise Prayer of the Day
Word (Reading) (Psalm or Gospel Acclamation) Holy Gospel Sermon (Hymn of the Day) Prayers	Word First Reading Psalm Second Reading Gospel Acclamation Holy Gospel Sermon Hymn of the Day (Creed) Prayers	Word First Reading Psalm Second Reading Gospel Acclamation Holy Gospel Sermon Hymn of the Day Creed Prayers	Word First Reading Psalm Second Reading Gospel Acclamation Holy Gospel Sermon Hymn of the Day Creed Prayers
Meal Presentation of the Gifts Great Thanksgiving Lord's Prayer Communion	Meal Presentation of the Gifts Great Thanksgiving Lord's Prayer Communion	Meal Presentation of the Gifts Great Thanksgiving Lord's Prayer Communion	Meal Presentation of the Gifts Great Thanksgiving Lord's Prayer Communion
Sending Closing Prayer Blessing & Dismissal	Sending Closing Prayer Blessing & Dismissal	Sending Canticle or Hymn Closing Prayer Blessing & Dismissal	Sending Canticle Closing Prayer Blessing & Dismissal (Hymn)

These basic liturgical patterns and texts can be celebrated with many kinds of music (or no music) and in a variety of settings. The leadership styles can vary greatly. Yet, the very shape and fundamental texts of the liturgy can transcend all variety and be a unifying and edifying instrument within the Church.

—Reprinted from *Worship '96*—September, © 1996 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

BIBLE FOCUS *Psalms 95: 1-7*

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the Scripture text and the following aloud. Discuss questions and reactions as they arise.

There is a clear image of the assembly at worship in this psalm. In the mind's eye, you can experience this congregation at work. There is an invitation: "Come, let's worship." Hear their exuberance: "Let us make a joyful noise." See their reverence: "Let us worship and

bow down; let us kneel before the Lord." Understand their motivation: "For he is our God and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand." This snapshot of ancient peoples going about their liturgy could well have been one taken from a twenty-first century photo album.

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Session 2 *continued*

Discuss the following. Encourage participants to make notes in their journals.

1. The actions described in the psalm are joyful. In a more solemn atmosphere, what might the picture look like? What language would express what is done in a solemn assembly?
2. Work together to write a modern day psalm of praise about worship. What elements would be important in the psalm? What actions? What words? How would the psalm compare to the Old Testament psalm?
3. Some of the actions found in worship are: praise, reflection, learning, prayer, repentance, welcoming, inspiration, and expressions of joy. How have you experienced these? What other experiences related to worship have you experienced? Share some of these.
4. In what way does corporate worship equip you for worship, witness and service in your daily living?

JOURNAL TIME

Gathering, Word, Meal, Sending

Journal work may be started during class time and completed later at home. It may be helpful to share some of your journal reflections.

Quilt makers often use traditional patterns to create a whole new coverlet; the fabrics and size may be different, but the quilt still bears the name of the original pattern. There is a pattern to the way we worship. The order of the communion liturgy has maintained relatively consistent for some 2,000 years. There is a comfort in knowing “what happens next,” yet each time we gather there is newness.

Note what happens and what you experience during the various parts of worship. How do those experiences differ from week to week? How are they the same?

Going

Final Thoughts

Planning the Gathering is a helpful chart associated with this study. It lists many current practices in worship and offers suggestions for alternative practices. It is available at www.elca.org/dcm/christian_education/resources. Consider downloading the materials and sharing them with the class.

Take some time to explore other liturgies in the *Lutheran Book of Worship, With One Voice* or *This Far by Faith*. Talk with your pastor and worship planners to see how there might be an opportunity to use a liturgy that has never been used in your congregation. Discuss which, and when it might be used. Use the chart on found at the Web site listed above to discover ways you might add variety to your current worship practices.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord God, master of time and space, we thank you for your call to us to be the sheep of your hand. Let your Spirit move in us that we might willingly invite others to pray, praise, and give thanks to you, the author of life. Amen.



Session 3

Sacred Space, Sacred Things, Sanctified Folks

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Make sure all feel welcome and are comfortable as the session begins. Take a few moments for participants to share some of their worship experiences during the past week or some of their journal entries. Encourage each in turn to respond to the following discussion starters.

1. Begin the session with a light-hearted game. Divide the group into two teams. Read a definition from the liturgical terms found on page 11. The first team to give the name of the liturgical term gets a point. Conclude by discussing the various articles in the worship space, and what makes them sacred to you.
2. What are the duties and responsibilities of those who care for altar and/or chancel preparations in your congregation? Invite someone who does this service to your class session to discuss their activities.

Let's Pray

Begin with prayer. Read the following aloud or speak a prayer of your choosing.

O, Lord, we give thanks and praise for the privilege of having a place of beauty in which to worship you. May we be good stewards of this sacred place and may all we do in it glorify you. Amen.

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the following aloud. Discuss your reactions to the story.

"Early one Sunday morning, I went to unlock the church. As I got within a block, I saw thick, black smoke coming from the direction of the church. The church sits in the middle of the block tucked between single-family houses. I was surprised others had not

already seen the smoke. I opened the door and saw that the ceiling was in flames. I dialed 911 from my cell phone. Fire trucks arrived and the fire people worked efficiently to extinguish the fire, but it had pretty much gutted the building.

Our church building was on the National Register of Historic Places, and in a flash, it was gone—the tiffany stained glass windows, the carved wooden paneling, gone. I thought, 'What are we going to do? Where are we going to worship? What is going to happen to us?' As I stood there with tears in my eyes, the spirits of the founders of our congregation comforted me. Our building sits in the middle of an historic cemetery; the remains of our founding members are right there on the grounds. I remembered that there was a time when there was no building at all, and we were the church, the people who were called, gathered, and enlightened with gifts by the Holy Spirit. By God's grace I knew we would rebuild St. Andrew's Lutheran Church. That same Holy Spirit still calls, gathers, and enlightens us today.

The rebuilding happened and the place was restored to much of its original beauty. But even if we had only been able to construct a less 'glorious' place, what we do in this space is to the glory of God, not the glory of our building."

Talk about the meaning and importance of your church building. When was it built? Why was it designed in a particular way? How does the building aid your worship?

BIBLE FOCUS

Matthew 3:13-17 The Baptism of Jesus

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the Scripture text and the following aloud. Discuss questions and reactions as they arise.

Washing – an act so simple that it was done hundreds of thousands of times, even in biblical times. Yet it became Holy Baptism through Jesus' command to

to next page

Session 3 *continued*

make disciples in this manner. By water and the Word of God, this once simple act changes everything; transforms both life and death. Even Jesus the Christ presented himself to be baptized. Though John the Baptizer was initially confused that the Messiah should present himself, we sense even in Jesus the desire to experience the exhilaration of that holy washing—a washing by which we are claimed by God. For Jesus' followers, baptism marks the beginning of a new life—new life in Christ and new life in the community of Christ.

If possible, watch a baptism together. Talk about what is happening in that act. How is the person baptized affected? How is the congregation involved? How is God's Spirit active? Talk about the meaning of your own baptism.

The presentation of adults for baptism is not uncommon. This process, called the Catechumenate is based on ancient practices of forming disciples and preparing adults for baptism over several months. There are four phases in the Catechumenate process:

1. Inquiry - an open-ended time of initial exploration.
2. Catechumenate –a period of deeper exploration of the Christian faith through reading of Scripture, prayer, worship and ministry in daily life
3. Baptismal preparation – the six weeks of Lent for those candidates baptized at the Easter Vigil.
4. Baptismal living or mystagogy – the post-baptismal period of study and reflections that extends throughout the fifty days of Easter and beyond.

For additional information about the Catechumenate and how it can be used in a congregation as a way to prepare adults for baptism go to www.elca.org/dcm/worship/catechumenate. You might download and copy some of the resources available on the site and share them with the class.

Discuss the following questions. Ask participants to make notes in their journals and share responses if they are willing to do so.

Is there currently a Catechumenate process in your congregation? If not, what process is used for initiating adults into the Christian faith? How might the actions of the Catechumenate be helpful to your congregation?

Discuss how the Catechumenate process can strengthen discipleship among adults who have been baptized, but have not been a part of a worshipping community for several years. How can it be helpful to others, even those who are interested in a process of spiritual renewal?

JOURNAL TIME

Journal work may be started during class time and completed later at home.

Read Luke 22:13-20, and take time to reflect on the institution of the Lord's Supper. There have been numerous images of the institution of the Supper given to us through various media – painting, films. Again, as with Baptism, the meal was a simple act, eating and drinking, done many times over and again. Yet through Jesus' command and the promise of God's grace, a seemingly simple act becomes the Sacrament of Holy Communion. While we believe in one Baptism for the forgiveness of sin, we partake of Holy Communion as often as it is offered; it is how we "take in" Christ. It is a communal meal we share with our siblings in Christ at the table of the Lord.

In what way is the meal distributed in your congregation? Can you see the faces of your brothers and sisters in Christ? How do you feel a connection to Christ with them? As you attend Holy Communion, reflect (in writing, if possible) on the meaning of the Holy Supper for you and for your congregation. Share some of these reflections with the class at your next session if you are willing to do so.

Going

Final Thoughts

Someone once said that creativity is a sacred obligation. God has endowed us with gifts of many kinds, not only those listed in Scripture. And we owe it to God to “discern and return,” whether that creativity is manifested in the arts, science or excellence in laying a tile floor.

1. What is stirred up in you when you encounter the sacred things in sacred places?
2. How can you make real in action what is stirred up in you?

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray or Sing!

Pray or Sing together the words of “Holy, Holy, Holy” (LBW 165)

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!
God in three persons, blessed Trinity! (Amen)

Some Common Liturgical Terms

Sacred Space

Chancel – area just beyond communion rail used by officiating clergy and assistants

Narthex – area just outside the Nave; may be used for greeting, gathering for processions, etc.

Nave – area in which the congregation sits

Sacred Things

Alb – full-length white robe worn by worship leaders

Altar – table used for the celebration of Holy Communion

Ambo – structure used for both reading of the lessons and the sermon, when only one is used

Baptismal Font – vessel that holds the water for Holy Baptism

Chalice – cup used for the wine in Holy Communion

Ciborium – vessel that holds the wafers for Holy Communion

Cincture – rope belt tied around the alb

Credence Table – table in the chancel to the side of the altar

Flagon – vessel that holds the wine that will be poured into the chalice

Lectionary – selected biblical readings for liturgical use throughout the church year

Lectern – structure from which the lessons are read

Pall – cloth covering that envelopes an object, such as a casket at a funeral

Paraments – coverings in appropriate liturgical colors hung over the altar, lectern and pulpit

Paten – plate on which the bread for Holy Communion is placed

Pulpit – structure from which the sermon is preached

Purificator – linen used to wipe the chalice during Holy Communion

Stole – strip of material, in proper liturgical color; worn over the shoulders of the clergy

Session 4

Seasons of the Son: the Church Year

Gathering

Make sure all feel welcome and are comfortable as the session begins. Take a few moments for participants to share some of their worship experiences during the past week or some of their journal entries. Encourage each in turn to respond to the following discussion starters.

1. In groups of two or three, share dates (birthdays, baptismal and wedding anniversaries, upcoming events, etc.) that have significance. How do these events serve as milestones throughout each year?
2. As a society that is consumed with quickness, ease, and micro-managed time, how do calendars help us keep order in all the rush? What would our lives be like if we didn't keep personal calendars? What would the world be like if we had never developed a systemized and universal calendar?
3. How can we find time to "breathe" in the rush of time? How does having structure allow for a sense of calm? How do we clear our minds and re-center our body?

Let's Pray

Begin with prayer. Read the following aloud or speak a prayer of your choosing.

Lord God, you hold our times in your hands, and for all our times – the good times and the ones we don't understand, we give you thanks. As we gather to reflect on the time of the Church, guide our teaching and learning that in your good time, we may fully understand you, the author of all time and space. Amen.

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the following aloud. You might read this material ahead of time and simply share it with the group. Discuss your reactions to the story.

"Fiscal calendars, academic calendars, sports calendars, enough, already! Not a church calendar, too!" Yes, a church calendar, too. But let's be honest, calendars help us keep track of time and special occasions. The difference with the church year is that it centers on the life of Christ and, therefore starts with Christ's beginnings. Dennis Bratcher of The Christian Resource Institute explains it this way:

"The sequence of festivals from Advent to Resurrection Sunday becomes an annual spiritual journey for worshippers as they kneel at the manger, listen on a hillside, walk the streets of Jerusalem, hear the roar of the mob, stand beneath the cross, and witness the resurrection!" —www.cresourcei.org

The Christian church year is ordered around 1) sacred time and 2) ordinary time (from the word "ordinal," meaning counted time). Sacred time includes Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter and concludes with Pentecost. The rest of the year following Pentecost is referred to as Ordinary Time (such as in 1st, 2nd, 3rd Sundays after Pentecost, etc.).

One element that builds awareness of the seasons of the church year, and employs the senses in the worship space is the use of the different colors associated with different seasons and festivals. Use the following chart as a reminder and to help you become more familiar with the colors for seasons and holidays.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.—Ecclesiastes 3:1

SEASONS

Advent
Christmas
Epiphany
Baptism of Our Lord
After Epiphany
Lent
Holy Week
Good Friday
Easter
Pentecost
Trinity
Sundays in Pentecost
Reformation
All Saints'
Christ the King

COLOR

Blue or Purple
White
White
White
Green
Purple
Scarlet or Purple
No color
White or Gold
Red
White
Green
Red
White
White or Gold

For a more detailed chart, consult "Calendar" in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* or go to www.elca.org/co/faq/chyear.html

BIBLE FOCUS Jeremiah 31:1-14

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the Scripture text and the following aloud. Discuss questions and reactions as they arise.

"At that time, says the LORD, I will be the God of all the families of Israel."

While we can set our calendars—secular or otherwise—we know that God's time is not ours to control. The phrase in this reading "At that time" speaks volumes about our limitations as creatures. The promise of God is sure, but the restoration of Israel is not to be measured by human instruments.

The people of Israel waited a long time for the Messiah. Yet when Messiah came, he was overlooked. And we, the new Israel, wait for the return of Messiah. The church's New Year's song, "O, Come, O, Come, Emmanuel" expresses our hope for the fulfillment of the same longings in the Jeremiah text – for God to be with us, restore us, bless us, give us comfort and gladness. Since God is not bound by time as are we, God is with us, we have been restored, blessed, and comforted. The kingdom is ours forever. God's pres-

ence with us becomes apparent as we journey through the church year, and hear, and see the salvation history unfold—the birth of the Christ, the Epiphany, Lent, Christ's passion, death and resurrection, his Ascension and the gift of the promised Holy Spirit.

Discuss the following questions. Ask participants to make notes in their journals and share responses.

1. God's time is not our time. Discuss the implications of this truth in your life and the life of your congregation.
2. Just as the secular calendar and seasons hold special memories, challenges, and plans so does the sacred calendar. What memories and challenges come to you through the events of the church year?

JOURNAL TIME

Invite participants to read the following and to record their thoughts about the questions in their journal.

Think about how the church year follows the natural cycle of the seasons. It never rushes from one season to the next, but allows ample time for reflection and meditation. During Advent, we experience the harshness of the cold and of life while the world waits for a much needed Messiah. In Epiphany, the stars shine bright in the dark winter nights. Lent and Easter bear witness to the transformation from death to new birth and the resurrection of life that comes in the spring. How does the cycle of events in the church year deepen our walk with Christ? What are ways you can personally and spiritually respond to the time spent in each season along the journey? What effect does this have on your mind and spirit?

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Session 4 *continued*

Going

Final thoughts

It takes a conscious effort to embrace the whole church year as a way that we celebrate and share the transition from death to new birth. We do that sharing not only in worship but the rhythm of the church year moves from Sunday mornings to becoming an active part of our lives. As we remember his birth, life, death and resurrection we follow along with Christ on a life-transforming journey. Grounded in this sacred structure, the worshipping assembly “breathes” during each season and is allowed to worship the Christ, pray for others, the world, ourselves, and give thanks to God—giver of all time.

CLOSING PRAYER

Good and gracious God, we thank you for this time of gathering, and learning about the time of your Church. Enrich us through your Holy Spirit that all our days in you may be fruitful and you may be glorified. Amen.



Suggested Resources

The following are available from Augsburg Fortress by calling 800/328-4648.

Worship Wordbook, Ralph Van Loon and Anita Stauffer. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1995) ISBN: 0-8066-0548-0

Lutheran Book of Worship : Manual on the Liturgy, Carlos R. Messerli and Philip H. Pfatteicher (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1979) ISBN: 0-8066-1676-8

Gathered and Sent: An Introduction to Worship, Leader's Guide, Roger Prehn, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1999) ISBN: 0-8066-3845-1

Liturgy on the Go: Connecting Worship and Daily Life. (Chicago, IL: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1994) ISBN: 6-0000-2861-X

Welcome to Christ: Lutheran Rites for the Catechumenate, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997) ISBN: 0-8066-3395-6

Calendar of Word and Season: Liturgical Wall Calendar, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress 2002) ISBN: 0-8066-4287-4

Altar Guild and Sacristy Handbook, S. Anita Stauffer. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2000) ISBN 0-8066-3896-6

Look for a variety of worship helps from the Division for Congregational Ministries worship team at www.elca.org/dcm/worship



worship (from Old English: "worthy") offering adoration, praise, and thanksgiving to God in recognition of God's holiness and in response to what God has done, continues to do, and promises yet to do for God's people and for all creation.

—from *Worship Wordbook* by Ralph Van Loon and Anita Stauffer; © 1995 Augsburg Fortress

Worship is a small-group Bible study in the Living Faith in Daily Life series, intended to help adult learners explore a deeper understanding of each of the seven faith practices, introduced in the Call to Discipleship materials. The other studies are listed below. Print copies of each study may be ordered by calling Augsburg Fortress, 800/328-4648, \$1.25 plus shipping. The Bible studies and supplementary materials are also available on-line at www.elca.org/dcm/christian_education/resources

Pray ISBN: 6-0001-6440-8

Study ISBN: 6-0001-6915-9

Worship ISBN: 6-0001-6916-7

Invite ISBN: 6-0001-6441-6

Serve ISBN: 6-0001-6914-0

(Watch for **Encourage** and **Give** scheduled to be published in 2004)



WORSHIP *Living Faith in Daily Life*

a small group Bible study on devotion and public worship

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