



Leaders Notes

Think about the church you grew up in. Did you know adults in the congregation outside of your family and church staff? How did those adults help to form and model faith practices for you? Chances are that adults leading youth today have a dramatically different experience and expectations of Christian community than the teens we lead and serve.

Many young people now have experienced community in very different ways than adults. Some have grown up uncomfortable looking people in the eye, having conversations with people in different age groups and feeling like everyone older than you have nothing but pressure-filled expectations. This can make it difficult for teenagers to understand what multi-generational Christian community is and potentially can be in Christ. Especially after a pandemic, teenagers may find it very difficult to invest in community.

Despite this, we know that true, deep and even intergenerational Christian community is essential: based on a need that God made us with, and planted deep inside our very essence and being, in His image. God made us for each other and draws us together in His Word and Sacrament. If unmet, our need for community can result in loneliness, isolation and even lead to situational depression, fear and more. Or we seek out to fill community with things that aren't of God. These are all results of the sinful condition of the world on this side of heaven. Yet our actual need for other people and connection is not the result of sin. God places the need for connection in us, but also places us in families, churches and youth ministries to meet those needs.

Session One: Community made in God's Image

Students will study how God has made them in His image, but we were not made to be alone. We need one another, and community in Christ is different from communities formed around anything else.

Session Two: Christian Community in Christian Families

The first community that God gives to us is usually in our family. Christian youth will appreciate the community God gives them in their immediate families.

Session Three: Christian Community in our Congregation

Congregational life is critical beyond youth ministry and attendance. Youth will be inspired to jump into church fellowship and service and to find a local church after high school if they move away.

Session Four: Christian Community in the World-Wide Church

Individuals and their local congregational community have an important place in the wider synod, the Christian church at large and Christians united over time. This study will help them appreciate this huge community around them.

Study One: Community made in God's Image

Outcome

Students will understand that having been made in God's image, we need one another, and that community in Christ is different from communities formed around anything other than Christ.

Before Bible study

Download this resource from the LCMS website:

<https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/F088178F-0412-4566-9679-E4F91E9302AE> and make a copy for each expected participant.

Opening conversation

- How would you describe your "group" at school or in the place your closest friends are? (Does your friend group have a name or label in your peer community?)

Opening game

Move to the left or right side of the room to put yourself in each category:

Morning Person; Night owl

Vegan; Meat – eater

CrossFit; Cyclist

Band; Football

Cheer; Debate

AP class; regular class

Rap; pop

Car; truck

Discussion and Study

- Can these groups get along?

These categories can be even more divisive if I'd dared to ask Democrat or Republican, CNN or Fox News, mask or no, pro-vaccine or anti-vax, which we won't do! It's easy to be drawn to people with similar interests, ideas and opinions. We even know that social media makes it easier to only connect with people who agree with you. But what binds us together as Christians is not personal preference: it's eternal, deeper, and based on something that lasts and has power beyond shifting opinions or changeable minds.

Let's open our Bibles to Genesis 1 to see how God made us in His image to need a deeper connection and supernatural community.

Have one student who is comfortable reading out loud read verses 1-2, and another read verses 26-28.

As we see, the Holy Spirit was present, hovering over the waters before God created the world, and when God speaks creation into being, God says, "Let us make man in our image." This plural word "our" isn't simply the "royal we." God is three in one: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, from before the beginning of time. And God makes us in His image.

Now let's look at Jesus' community. Let's turn to the Gospels, Mark 1:16.

Have a student read Mark 1:16, and another read verse 29. Turn to Mark 2 and have a student read verse 13.

Jesus called a close yet diverse group of friends to be His disciples. These twelve apostles lived and traveled with Jesus for three years. They lived in community. This community wasn't drawn together by their similarities, or by the old phrase "opposites attract." These individuals became a community around a person: Jesus.

Have a student read Mark 3:7.

Not only did Jesus live with his twelve apostles, He withdrew from large crowds together with them for time together, resting together, not just working together. We see that God is in community with God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus lived in community. God made us in His image.

- What does that mean for us?
- Jesus sets a perfect example for community. How do we see Jesus' community of disciples struggle? How might we struggle to build community like Jesus did?

Let's go back to Genesis 1 again. I'll read out loud and you read along with me.

Read Genesis 1:4-31 out loud, pausing each time you see the word "good," and look up. Wait to move on until the students say the word "good." Point out that on the sixth day, God saw that creation "was very good."

Read out loud to your students Genesis 2:18.

It is *not good* that man should be alone. The fall hasn't happened yet. Adam and Even hadn't sinned. That doesn't happen until Genesis 3. So, the first time something is not good is before sin entered God's perfect creation. God saw that it was not good for man to be alone. God made us to need other people. We need other people in relationship around us; God made us that way on purpose.

Now let's turn to Acts 2 and see how the earliest Christians experienced God-given community:

Have a student read verses 42-47.

- Is that how we live today? Can you imagine living like that?
- How often do you have meals with people from church together?
- We can idealize the early church, but they struggled too. How does time together in God's Word and Sacrament tie people together?

Distribute the resource from the LCMS.org link listed above.

Together, read the Nicene Creed. Let's read the second to last sentence of the third article together again: I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church.

Look up above the Nicene Creed to the Apostles' Creed. Let's read the last sentence together: I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

- Who ties together the holy Christian church?
- What does "the communion of saints" mean?
- What does it mean that we confess ONE holy Christian church?
Take time to talk about how faith in Jesus as our Savior the most important thing the Christian church shares. Without Jesus' death and resurrection, we couldn't build a community around His love and grace.
- When we are tied together through the gift of faith, how does this help us work together?
- How does this help us to build relationship with people who are different than us?

Closing Prayer

Communities are bound together in God's love. When Jesus unites us, the Holy Spirit gives us community and unity. For our closing prayer today, I'm going to read Jesus' prayer that He prayed for us immediately before His arrest and crucifixion, right before He died, recorded for us in John 17, starting at verse 20.

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that they world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved the world." Amen.

Study Two: Christian Community in Christian Families

Outcome

Christian youth will appreciate the community God gives them in their immediate families.

Before the Bible study

- Everyone needs an ESV Bible. You also need one NIV Bible.
- Bring at least one hymnal for every other participant.
- If playing the game, assemble kitchen supplies and make sure you have a clear space large enough for your group to play.
- Every participant needs a sheet of paper to write on. Consider using construction paper and Sharpies or markers instead of lined paper and pens to stimulate creativity.
- Put sticky paper on a wall or use a room with a white board and white board markers.

A note for adult leaders: As you prepare for this study, think about the individual students you expect to attend and participate, and what you know of their personal family situations. Prepare with prayer, and an eye and a heart towards sensitive differences. Consider using the term "household" when I use the word "family" if it might alleviate some difficulties for your group.

Opening discussion

Tell the group about your family of origin, and the faith you did or did not grow up with. Share about a family member from whom you learned about Jesus.

Tell us something we don't know yet about your household.
Tell the friend right next to you about the household member who best embodies Christ's presence in your life.

Optional house-related game (15 minutes): Kitchen Hockey (instructions are at <https://thesource4ym.com/kitchen-hockey>)

Discussion and Study

Turn to the Psalms and have a student who is comfortable reading out loud read Psalm 68:4-6.

- What are the names the Psalmist gives to God in this passage?
Father of the fatherless, protector of widows
- Why are these significant names?
We need fathers, parents, spouses, extended family, or household of people.

Read Psalm 68:6a: God settles the solitary in a home.

- Who is/are “the solitary?”
- How does it help solitary people to be in a home?
- What does “home” mean or communicate to you?
- How is “home” different than “house?”

Re-read Psalm 68:6 from the NIV: God sets the lonely in families.

- Which translation do you prefer, and why?
- How do these two different translations say same thing and focus on something different in English?

Read Proverbs 31:10, 15, 21

Have students write on a white board or sticky paper (such as poster-size Post-it papers) on the wall things God provides that they need in their lives through their parents.

- What are some provisions God generally gives to His people through their households? Encourage students to think of both physical and emotional needs God meets in households.
- How does God use the vocations of parents, children, siblings and more to point you back to Jesus and how He has saved you?
- How can your family help you to deepen your understanding of God and live out your faith in Jesus?

Have a student read Psalm 139:13 out loud.

Be sensitive to the different family situations represented in the room and potential feelings that may result from a variety of parenting make-ups. If you have students in the room who need to read additional verses at this point, see below regarding Jesus’ family of origin and feel free to re-arrange the order of the Bible study.

God put you in the family He placed you in for a reason.

- Think about and list privately some things that God specifically gives to *you* in your own household and think about what makes your family unique.
- What are some ways you have seen God work in your family to share His love and grace?

Last week we looked to the Trinity as a model for community, and to Jesus’ life with His disciples as an example of Christian friendship. Today let’s look at the earthly family that God the Father placed Jesus in on earth.

Have students silently read Matthew 1:1-15 to themselves. Have a student read Matthew 1:16 out loud.

Jesus was born into a family. Mary was His birth mother; Joseph served as Jesus’ earthly father. As we read the New Testament, we see that Jesus had younger siblings.

Have students read Mark 3:31-35.

Jesus knows what it's like to be born into a family that passed down the faith to Him. Jesus knows what it's like to be adopted into a family that passed down the faith to Him.

Jesus celebrated holidays with His family growing up, had daily meals with them, prayed and worshiped with them, traveled with them (Luke 2:40-50), and had private family jokes with them.

Read John 19:25-27.

- How did Jesus treat His family?
- What about families where parents aren't good examples of God's love and provision?
- How does Jesus redeem the pain that can result in those situations?
- What about families that don't model Christian community?
- What are some other ways that Jesus provides community in those situations?

If time, Read Luke 2:40-50.

In Jesus' time, families lived in larger household communities than we do today. (The Greek word *oikos* refers to large community households that included extended families but also expanded community in a family-like atmosphere.)

- Where does your closest extended family live?
- How often do you see your extended family?
- What is the Christian community like in your extended family?
- How can we, as young people, deepen the Christian community in our extended families?

Wrap-up

In closing, read 2 Timothy 1:5.

Think back to your immediate household.

- Who and what can you thank God for in your immediate family?
- How has the Lord provided to meet your needs in that specific Christian community? (If you have teenagers whose parents don't know Jesus, add: How can you share your faith in a respectful way with your family community that God has placed you in?)
- How can you invest in the community God placed you in through your household?

Closing prayer

Jesus, thank you for our families. Help them to be a place that points us back to Your love and grace. Give us true connection and community in our homes. Amen.

Study Three: Christian Community in our Congregation

Outcome

Individual teenagers will be inspired to live congregational life beyond youth ministry and attendance, and youth groups will be inspired to jump into church-wide fellowship and service. Youth will also be committed to finding a local church after high school if they move away.

Opening discussion

Tell us about your best friend.

- How did you meet that person? Did you choose that person? Did he or she choose you? Was being drawn to each other mutual?
- Was it immediate or did it take time?
- How long did it take for that person to become your closest friend?

Discussion and Study

"You can pick your friends. You can pick your nose. But you can't pick your friend's nose." Also, you also can't pick the people who go to church with you!

God places us in our congregations, and while we may "choose" our church, we don't choose every person we sit in the pews with, or every person in this room even! We rarely choose to make friends with someone ten, twenty, or sixty years older than we are, or with someone ten years younger than we are either. Yet that's frequently who God purposefully and wisely surrounds us with in churches.

- What are some of your favorite things about our church?
- Name someone in our church who isn't involved with youth ministry, who isn't on staff, who is not in your immediately family, who you admire, and why.
- What things do we do together in our church that make it easy to see deep Christian community beyond generations?
- What makes it difficult to experience community outside of our own generation?
- What different generations learn from each other as they build relationships?

Keep in mind; share if you feel there is time:

One common conflict in friendships boils time to arguments over time commitments. Time shows value. Feeling undervalued damages friendship and certainly doesn't start friendships. There are often times when what people value and how they want to spend resources hurts our relationships in church.

Another common conflict is miscommunication. We especially see that between generations that have different ways of talking, sharing experiences and expression. It can be easy within a church to fail to communicate well and make assumptions based on age and how we share our stories. Both of these are helped when we can forge friendship in play and service.

Read Matthew 18:20.

- What does Jesus promise when we gather in His name?
- How does that make church different than other ways people spend time together?

Back up in Matthew 18. Read verses 15-20 to see verse 20 in context.

In our first study, we talked about what is unique about Christian community as opposed to community formed around common interests. One thing that makes church community unique is that only in Jesus can we truly forgive one another.

- How should handling conflict and caring for each other be different in the church than in other groups?
- What happens when we fail to treat each other this way? How can forgiveness in Jesus' help us to stay together as a community?
- How did you practice forgiveness and/or a Matthew 18 model of Christian conflict resolution in our group at the LCMS Youth Gathering last summer?

Church is uniquely the place we can both receive and practice forgiveness in Jesus. It's special and set apart, centered around Jesus.

- Tell us about your baptism. What do you know about that day? Who are your sponsors? Do you remember it or know from stories? Have you seen pictures of it?

Read Galatians 3:27-29.

- How does baptism unite us in Christ and make us one body?
- How does that create Christian community?

If any students have not been baptized, after this study is a great time to offer to talk to a pastor with them about baptism.

Let's remember our baptisms now.

Distribute the hymnals and have everyone turn to the Sacrament of Baptism (found on page 268 in *The Lutheran Service Book*.) Together, read the opening out loud. Once you get to the naming of candidates, either have students read it to themselves, hearing their name, picturing their parents, sponsors and the pastor who baptized them, or partner up and read it to each other out loud, using names.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-26.

- What is it that the Corinthians were doing that divided their community?

Back up chapter 10 and read verses 16-17.

- What is supposed to happen when we take the Lord's supper together?
- What does it mean that it is one bread? What does it mean that we are one body?

Community asks a lot but offers even more. Christianity isn't just worth dying for; it's worth living for. Our gift of faith in Jesus' death and resurrection changes not just eternity, but also how we live our lives today. Christian community is part of that. God saw our salvation as worth the death of His Son, and the Holy Spirit unites us in community that gives us life.

- What are some church fellowship events that you/I/our group can jump into intergenerationally?
- What are some ways we can share stories and get to know about other people in our congregation?
- What are some church-wide service projects our congregation participates in that we can join?
- What will the adults in the church think of us if we participate and don't keep to ourselves?
- What will the kids younger than us see and grow up thinking about what we think of them?
- And what will church life will be like for them when they are our age? What could church life be like for everyone in our congregation when they are our age?

God gave us each other in our congregational community. This is one of our vocations as Baptized children of God. It is important to know that we have a role in our church no matter our age. God works through us to bring unique gifts, skills, and insights to our church.

Maybe you feel very well connected in our congregation now. But not everyone will stay where in the same city their whole lives! It's common that at some point you are going to have to find a new congregation in a new town. It is important that we think about what that will look like and plan before that happens.

- If you move away, how will you pick your new church in a new location?
- How will that community feel different than our church now? How might that be difficult to navigate?
- What service opportunities might you seek out? How can service help connect you to others and the mission of the church?

- What things might make it harder to jump in and build relationships in a new church?

Feel free to read or share my story or replace it with an experience of your own.

When I was a freshman in college, I didn't miss home or my family the first week of school. On Sunday, I went to a new church. As I worshipped the same God in a new congregation who I grew up worshipping with the church my family went to back home, I was doing just fine until we sang a familiar hymn to an unfamiliar tune. The change of style highlighted the changes in my life and I ran to the bathroom and cried, suddenly hit by a loneliness that had hidden until that different expression made me realize how different this Christian community was than the one I grew up in. While the worship style was different, and the expectations and life together of the different community were different, the one God we all worshipped was the same. The feelings of being an outsider disappeared over time, and I felt welcomed at a church that fed me potlucks each week after church and told me time and again how exciting it was to have a college student in worship each week.

Add this discussion if time allows

- How many of you plan to go to college? (If your group is large, students can raise hands to indicate their answer.)

When you go off to college, you choose your classes, you can choose to pick your own roommates or have them assigned, you can choose your cafeteria and choose your food.

- How will you pick your church?
- How important is it to you to find a church to plug into when you get to school?
- For those who are planning on an alternative to college after high school, what do you intend to do when you graduate?
- What are similar things that you will choose to college students? What will be different about your options?
- If you are staying here, will you keep coming to church? How might your experience change?

The following group discussion questions can be omitted if they do not apply.

- How will life be different being part of this church beyond youth group?
- What volunteer opportunities will you seek out that you don't currently do here?

Closing

Jesus lived radically counter-culturally: He lifted up and included women (Matthew 9:18-26), children (Luke 18:15-17) and outsiders (John 4:1-54; Mark 7:24-37) in a culture that devalued them and didn't consider them worthy of an equal place in their community. Being a young person who is active in your church is one of the most unexpected and radically counter cultural things you can do, and a way to live that, like the Jews traveling among nations before the conquest of Israel living holy laws very different than those of the cultures that surrounded them, can point people who don't know God to the source of real community: Jesus and His transformational love.

- With the power of the Holy Spirit, can you commit to a church activity here outside of youth group?
- With the power of the Holy Spirit, can we commit to a church-wide activity together?
- With the power of the Holy Spirit, can you commit to church after high school?

(If appropriate, try to guide the students to an emphatic "Yes, with the help of God!")

Closing prayer

God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, thank you for our church. Thank you for our pastors and church workers. Thank you for our volunteers, servant leaders, and youth ministry leaders. Thank you for putting each person here that you brought to this room tonight: you brought us here together on purpose. Help us to value and appreciate one another, and fully enjoy the community you bind us in. Amen.

Close by blessing one another, making the sign of the cross on each other's foreheads and saying, "Remember your baptism, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

Session Four - Christian Community in the World-Wide Church

Outcome

Students will understand how they as individuals and their local congregational community fit within the synod, Christians united despite denominational differences, and Christians united over time.

Before the Bible study

Collect the following: dictionary, silly prizes for game, photocopies of the resource of the creeds

Opening Game

Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow from

<https://thesource4ym.com/yesterday-today-and-tomorrow/>

Field-tested tip: I find it both most cost-effective and humorous to give out silly prizes, like Spam, paper coupons, or unused freebie swag.

Or

Have a student look up "ecumenical" in the dictionary and read it to the group. Have the group write its own definition in today's words (or pick a style of music to describe a literary frame of reference if they struggle with the "today's words" phraseology) to make sure they understand what the word means.

Examine the resource sheet from the first session that shows our creeds.

- Why do we use the words "ecumenical" or "universal" to describe these creeds?

Discussion and Study

Our congregation is our local church, but the church is larger than *our* church. Our church is part of a denomination, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Synod can be an odd word but it comes from Greek words that mean "together" and "way", which indicate that we are a group that is walking together in the same beliefs. That means that churches that are a part of our Synod share an understanding about the Bible, our faith, and have a shared structure.

We use the word synod to describe our church body because there are over 40 different denominations that all identify as "Lutheran."

- Can you name some other Lutheran churches in our geographical area that aren't LCMS?
- How might they be different than us in what they believe and practice?

Within the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, we are split into 35 districts. These are designed to help support congregations closer to home. Have your students look up your district website on their smart phones or on a laptop.

- How many churches are in our district?
- How many schools are in our district?
- How many states are in our district? (Or how many districts are in our state?)

We are also partners with church bodies across the globe. Show your students this webpage: <https://www.lcms.org/how-we-serve/international/partner-church-bodies> . Have students look at the list of countries our denomination has partner church bodies in, and have students tell the group what other countries listed on this page, if any, they would have visited, and/or would like to visit.

Christian denominations have important key differences in belief. We don't just disagree on insignificant things and it's important to know our doctrine. Yet if you have visited another church for worship, you might notice they confess the same creeds, and are filled with people who have accepted the free gift of the grace, mercy and forgiveness of Jesus. We know we will see many of them in heaven with us someday. Christianity unites us around the person of Jesus Christ, our God and Savior. There are almost 2.4 billion Christians in the world. We call this the "church universal."

Leader Note: This is a great opportunity for you to explore the distinct beliefs of different denominations and how even Lutheran synods have different beliefs. While we want to emphasize the community of believers is larger than their local church, we do not want to ignore the differences between Christian denominations. It can be important to take questions from youth around this so they can be confident in talking with their peers from other Christian denominations.

Read Colossians 1:1-14.

- Had Paul ever been to Colossae?

Read Colossians 2:1-5.

- Did he personally know the Laodicean Christians? Does it sound like they were strangers?
- Does it sound like Paul felt affection for and unity and community with them?
- How did we have community as a church at the beginning of the pandemic when we didn't see each other in person like we did before that or like we do right now?

Read Colossians 1:15-18.

- How does Jesus hold us together?
- What does it mean that Jesus is the head of the church?

Read Hebrews 12:1-2.

- What does cloud of witnesses mean?

Look back at Hebrews 11.

- Who does Hebrews 11 talk about?
Just have students skim the chapter individually to figure out the answer, heroes of the Old Testament.
- What do we, as Christians, have in common with this list of people?
We all know and worship God the Father, and have received the gift of faith through the Holy Spirit.

Have a student athlete in the room share about people who come cheer him or her on.

- How does it make you feel that the spectators are not just watching you but rooting for you? Does it ever help you play better?
- How is our Christian cloud of witnesses that are living like that? Both in your congregation and outside of it, like extended family, baptismal sponsors, etc.
- Remember your confirmation day. How was the church like a cloud of witnesses for you on that day?
- Who is someone you can cheer on or root for in the faith?
- Who can you build up and encourage?
- How can you invest in the faith community like a cloud of witnesses?

Feel free to share my story or one of your own

My grandfather died when I was a senior in college. The Sunday after his funeral, my church celebrated Holy Communion. When I received communion that day, I was struck by the fact that even though my grandfather now lives in heaven, I'm still united with him. We still have the unity of Jesus Christ, and Christian community, beyond the constraints of this world, because of Jesus.

When we confess the creeds and when we share the Lord's Supper, we are united over time and space with those who share our faith.

- Share about someone you love who loved Jesus, and lives with Him now in heaven.

Read Romans 6:3-5.

Since all Christians are united with Jesus in baptism and in death and in the resurrection, we are also united, in Him, together with one another.

Read I Corinthians 1:10-13.

- How does baptism unite us in Jesus?

Closing

Say, play or sing "May God Bestow on Us His Grace," Hymn 823 or 824, LSB/ "May God Embrace Us With His Grace," Hymn 288, Lutheran Worship

