

First Lutheran Church of Venice
Foundations Class – Fall 2013
Session 10 – Life Together at First Lutheran Church of Venice

What is the Church?

“Will you come to church with me?” If someone asks you that, what do they mean? Are they inviting you to the church building for a potluck? Are they inviting you to a worship service? Are they inviting you to become a part of the congregation? What does the word *church* mean?

In the Apostles’ Creed, we confess “I believe in...the Holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins.” Here is the bedrock meaning: **the Church** (note the capital C!) is the fellowship of all those, living and dead, who trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. As we confess in the Nicene Creed, there is only One, Holy, Christian [catholic] and Apostolic **Church**. The Church is not a building, nor a club. We do not join it by our own decision. We do not build it by our own strength. It is God’s creation. The Church is people called by the Spirit of God to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior.

This, then, helps us sort out all the other uses of the word “church”:

Worship services are called “church” only because the Church (believers) hear God’s Word, receive His Sacraments, and praise His name.

A building is called “church” because that is where the Church (believers) gathers.

The Lutheran “Church” is a grouping of believers who follow a certain confession.

These uses of the word *church* involve something believers in Jesus do. But, at its heart, the Church is the sum total of all those who believe in Jesus Christ.

From our Lutheran Confessions:

“Our churches teach that one holy Church is remain forever. The Church is the congregation of saints [Psalm 149:1] in which the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered...As Paul says, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (AC VII 1, 4)

“Thank God, today a seven-year-old child knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their shepherd [John 10:11-16].” (Luther, SA III XII 2)

Joining a Church

The local congregation, or church, is the place where the “real action” of the Church happens.

Why join a church?

1. The New Testament simply assumes that every person who is brought to faith in Christ becomes part of the [C]hurch, which is embodied locally in a congregation or [c]hurch (Acts. 2:41-47). In the Bible, to be joined to Christ is to be joined to the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13, 27; Rom. 12:5; Eph. 5:29–30). Christians *confess* Christ and *serve* Christ, not in independent isolation, but as active members of his Body within a local church. Our Christian life is always deeply *personal*, but never *private*. We are called to a *life together* (Heb. 10:24-25, Gal. 6:9-10).
2. In the local congregation of believers, God’s people, led by their pastor, worship, baptize, preach, teach, confess and forgive, gather at the Lord’s Table, and reach others with the saving message of Christ.
3. It’s where you embody and experience certain biblical images. It’s within the church that Christians live and experience the interconnectivity of Christ’s body (1 Cor. 12), the spiritual fullness of His temple (Eph 2:19-22), and the safety and intimacy and shared identity of his family.
4. It’s how you serve other Christians. Membership helps you to know which Christians on planet Earth you are specifically responsible to love, serve, warn, and encourage. It enables you to fulfill your responsibilities to Christ’s body (Eph. 4:11-16, 25-32; 1 Jn. 3:14, 1 Thess. 5:17, Heb. 13:17).
5. God commands the church, through its pastors and leaders, to shepherd Christ’s flock and to exercise pastoral oversight and care (Acts. 20:28, 1 Pet. 5:1-4, Mt. 18, 1 Cor. 5). The church can’t carry out this wonderful and awesome responsibility if it doesn’t know who is part of the flock!
6. It’s how you officially represent the Triune God to the world and declare your allegiance to Him.
7. It builds a witness and invites the nations. Membership puts the alternative rule of Christ on display for the watching universe (see Matt. 5:13; John 13:34-35; Eph. 3:10; 1 Pet. 2:9-12).

What church do I join?

When we are thinking of joining a church, we should be satisfied that it teaches what the Bible says and uses the Sacraments in the way God has commanded. As Scripture warns us in several places, we are to avoid churches which lead us away from Jesus Christ (e.g., Gal. 1:6-9).

Joining First Lutheran Church of Venice

1. What does it mean to be a member at First Lutheran?

Many people attend First Lutheran Church each week. Some are members, some are not. We welcome all into this congregation. The difference between “members” and “attenders” may be summed up in one word: commitment. Commitment is demonstrated through:

- Growing through the means of grace
 - o Regular attendance at worship services
 - o Spiritual growth through study of God’s Word and prayer
- Supporting the Church’s witness and acts of mercy
 - o Contributing regularly to the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations
 - Envelopes for regular giving are provided by the financial secretary (Brenda Stoppel); an online option is being prepared
 - Opportunities to support relief and evangelism agencies are provided in the bulletin on a regular basis
 - o Serving through one of the many support and leadership opportunities within the Church (see “Opportunities to Serve at First Lutheran Church”)
- Serving the brothers and sisters
 - o Building up and supporting one another in love; aiding one another in sickness and distress; desiring to maintain unity and seeking reconciliation and forgiveness
- Living faithfully within our God-given vocations

2. How does one join?

To become a “communicant member”:

- a. Baptism at the completion of the “Foundations” class and discussion (and perhaps further instruction) with Pastor. For adults, the commitment to membership is included as part of the process of baptism.
- b. For those already baptized:
 1. Public profession of faith (see “Profession of Faith” below) in the worship service you usually attend and
 2. Signing of the Membership Covenant and filling out the Member Information Form, usually after completion of “Foundations” class or discussion with Pastor.
 3. For those current members of a Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod congregation, request a transfer of membership from your current home congregation.

To become a “voting member”:

Voting membership. Voting members are communicant members who have reached the age of eighteen and who have signed the Constitution and By-Laws. Reception to voting membership shall be approved by the Voters’ Assembly at the end of its meeting. The holding of any congregation office shall be subject to the restrictions established by Article IV of the Constitution.

Members who have not recently attended a Voters’ Assembly, but otherwise qualify to become voting members may vote on issues of outstanding importance, including the search and call of a new pastor or as otherwise established as being of outstanding importance by a Voters’ Assembly at a prior meeting, if (1) the member has attended a full session of a Church Council-endorsed non-voting meeting in which the issue has been thoroughly presented and discussed and (2) the member has been a communicant member for at least one year.

The Constitution and By-laws of this congregation are available for review at <http://www.flvenice.org/documents.html>.

Next Reception into Membership (celebrated at worship service): January 13, 2013 or earlier

Profession of Faith

This is an opportunity for the individual to make a public confession of faith and publicly identify with the life and mission of the First Lutheran community.

What are you asked in the profession of faith?

- Confession of the Faith
 - o Acknowledgment of the many gifts that God gave you in your baptism
 - o A confession of our Triune God, using the words of the Apostles' Creed
 - o A confession of the "prophetic and apostolic Scriptures" as the "inspired Word of God"
 - o A familiarity with the teachings of the Small Catechism as drawn from the Scriptures, and an acceptance of this teaching as our shared foundation of faith
- Life Together under that Confession
 - o Intent to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully
 - o Intent to live according to the Word of God
 - o A commitment to support the congregation with your prayers and God-given gifts

Opportunities to Serve at First Lutheran Church of Venice

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Of course, we have opportunities to give in many places in our lives. Listed below are opportunities to experience the joy of giving, both in our larger Westside community and at First Lutheran Church.

1. If you are looking for ways to get involved in the community, check out our weekly announcements in the bulletin. We have relationships with Habitat for Humanity of Greater Los Angeles, Bible Tabernacle, and Harvest Home, among others. And, bring us your ideas!
2. If you are looking for ways to give and serve here at First Lutheran, again, pay attention to the bulletin. Or contact Pastor Chris or any of our leaders. There are many opportunities and needs! Or, if you have ideas, please bring them to one of us!

Some examples:

Altar Guild Worker (coordinator: Paul and Andria Shultz)
Choir Member
Eucharistic Minister / Communion Assistant
Flower Coordinator
Scripture Reader
Children's Church Teacher / Assistant
Sunday school Teacher / Assistant
Care Meals Coordinator
Name Tag Coordinator
Nursery Coordinator / Worker
Prayer Chain Member
Coffee Hour Coordinator / Worker
Fall Festival Chair / Support
Vacation Bible School
Director/Teacher/Helper
Offering Counter
Social media
Webmaster
Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML) – multiple events (Barbara Perini)
Musician (contemporary: Scott Cross; organ: Steve Olson and Lynne Glick)
Usher (Rudy Olson)

Formal leadership positions (along with current holder)

President – Karl Jennings
Treasurer – Marie Tieck
Secretary – Jennifer Botte
Board of Trustees – Jimbo Barnett, Gary Stoppel, Tim Drier
Worship – Paula Sherrin
Fellowship and Mission – vacant
Board of Christian Ed – Nicole Dieterichs, Elizabeth Pennington, Rheta Stoppel, Lori Tranquilla, Ulf Hermjakob
Elders – Chuck McMahan, Rachel Swanger, Allan Hess, Klaus Dunst, Hal Printup, Doug Kamin