



What is a Church?

Lesson 11:
What is a Church?

Introduction: Why are there so many churches that call themselves “Christian?”

The Christian Church

Includes all people who by God-given faith confess Jesus as their SAVIOR. As we learned in a previous lesson, only God can work saving faith in the heart of a sinner. God works through the Means of Grace (The Gospel in all its forms: _____ & _____)

Wherever these faith-creating means are, you can expect that there will be members of the Church (Isaiah 55:10-11). Only God knows who are members of his Church because only God can read human hearts. (1 Samuel 16:7) The Apostles’ Creed refers to this Church as “the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.” It is also referred to as the “Invisible Church” or the “Universal Church.”

The only way we humans can tell what a person believes is by that person’s public confession (denominational membership.)

The Invisible Church

Visible Churches

Heterodox

Orthodox

Folks gathered around the Word mixing in one or more errors. (Promoting or persisting in error)

A church that teaches all of God’s Word, administers the Sacraments faithfully and rightly, & practices doctrinal discipline (its practices agree with profession of faith)

Denominations (& visible churches)

1. Does God want all Christians to be united? (John 17:20,21; 1John 1:3)

1 Corinthians 1:10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

Written...that
you may
have life.

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2. What should be the basis for this unity? (Romans 14:19)

Deuteronomy 4:2 Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.

Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

John 8:31b ...Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples."

Ephesians 4:3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

A confession of faith is always a confession to the entire Word of God.

- "joining a church"
- judging hearts vs. judging confession (1John 4:1)
- use words "infallible, inerrant, inspired"
- descriptive vs. prescriptive passages
- Biblical vs. traditional passages and practices

3. What should we do when we find a church which teaches all of God's Word in truth?

(Colossians 3:16; 1Corinthians 10:16,17; Acts 15:1-32; Galatians 2:1-10)

Hebrews 10:23-25 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Key term: Church Fellowship

Church fellowship is every expression of faith in which Christians join together because they are united by their acceptance and confession of all that the Bible teaches.

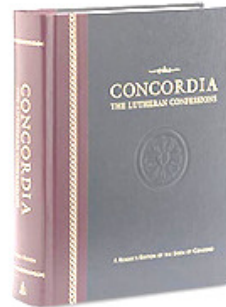
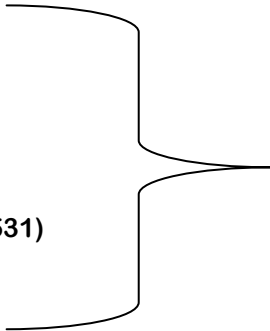
How do we express church fellowship?

- altar
- pulpit
- worship
- missions
- education
- prayer
- church work



Look at the church's published confessions...

- Apostles Creed
- Nicene Creed
- Athanasian Creed
- Small and Large Catechism (1529)
- Unaltered Augsburg Confession (1530)
- Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1531)
- Smalcald Articles (1537)
- Formula of Concord (1577)



“This We Believe” <http://www.wels.net/what-we-believe/>

4. What should we do when we find that a church teaches something other than God's Word? (By *adding* to it, *taking away* from it or *changing* it.) (Ephesians 4:15, 1Timothy 1:18-20)

Persistent errorist vs. weakness in faith/questions

2 Timothy 4:3-4 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth & turn aside to myths.

Titus 3:10 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. 10 Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. 11 You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. .

Romans 16:16-18 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings. I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. 18 For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.



Why is it so important that we are fed with ONLY the Truth of God's Word? (Matthew 16:6; Mark 8:15; Galatians 5:9 ; 2Timothy 2:17)

For discussion: What is a "non-denominational" church? (Is that good?)

Should Lutherans of different synods worship together?

Evaluate: As long as you believe in Jesus, it doesn't make any difference what church you join.

Is it ok if I belong to a lodge and a Christian congregation at the same time? (Masons, Elks, Moose, Shriners, etc.)

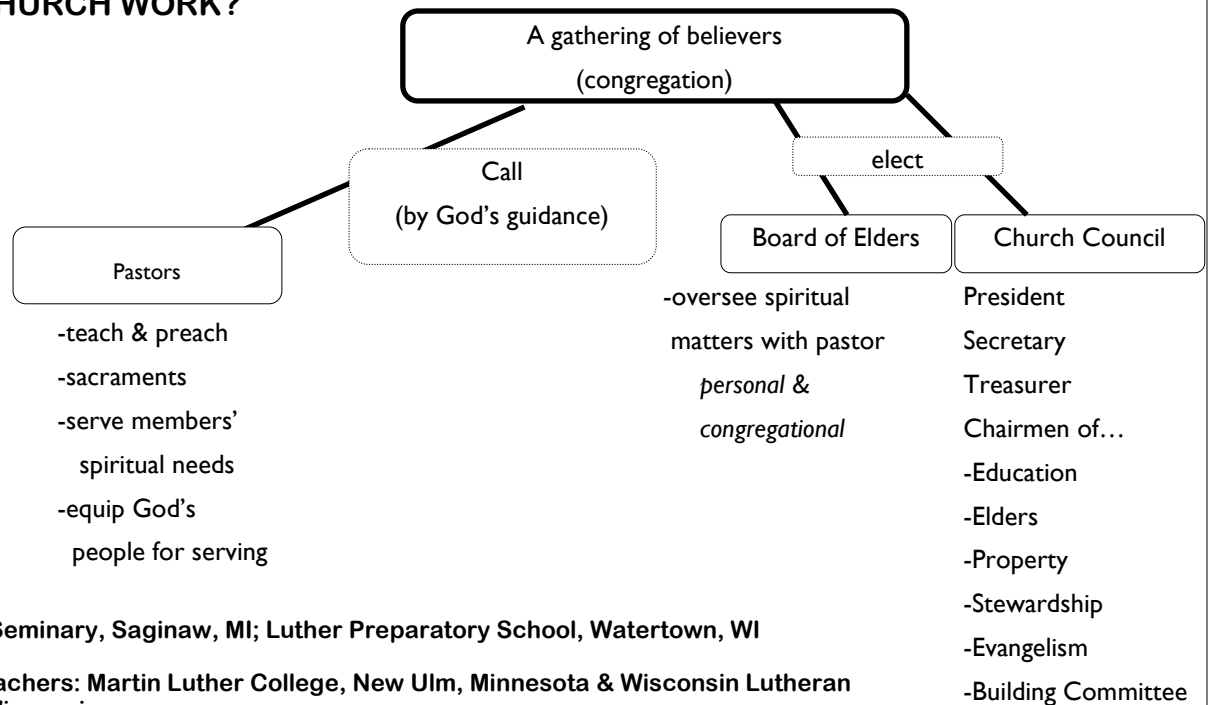
How can we best demonstrate love for fellow church members involved in persistent sin or doctrinal error? (Matthew 28:19,20; Matthew 18:15-17 ; 1Timothy 4:1-6; Galatians 5:9)

A/D: The correct name of the Invisible Church is the Holy Catholic Church.

A/D: The Invisible Church includes all who have the true teaching.

Are there Christians in false-teaching churches? (Isaiah 55:10,11)

HOW DOES A CHURCH WORK?



- Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, MI; Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, WI

-Train pastors and teachers: Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota & Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin

-Produce worship and Bible Study materials (Northwestern Publishing House www.nph.net)

-Begin and maintain new churches in North America ("home missions")

-Begin and maintain missions throughout the world ("world missions")

-Administer these efforts and represent our synod (WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, Waukesha, WI)

- our Synod President: _____

-Broken into 12 districts. Our district: _____ (see map)

* Our synod...the WELS (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod) 1850 AD

