

MEMBERS OF THE BODY

YVONNE: Shh! Here she comes!

ALICIA: Oh, hi, everybody!

STAN: Hi.

BARB: Hi, Alicia.

CARL: Hi.

(Long pause as the group uncomfortably stands facing Alicia.)

ALICIA: What's up?

ALL: Oh, nothing.

ALICIA: How's your sister, Stan? I haven't seen her in a long time.

STAN: Fine.

(Another long pause.)

ALICIA: Ah, well, I guess I need to get going. See you all later! *(Alicia leaves.)*

BARB: I never know what to say to her, you know?

CARL: Did you hear her say, "See you all later"? I mean, she's blind and all. Why would she say something like that?

YVONNE: I sure wouldn't want to be blind, would you?

STAN: I really feel sorry for her, but she makes me feel uncomfortable.

• Have you ever been in Alicia's position of wanting to be included in a group, but finding out that you weren't welcome for some reason? Maybe you have been part of a group that kept someone out. Can you think of a time like that? Do differences between people usually bring them together or keep them apart?

3 STATEMENTS

- Our differences are God's way of distributing divine gifts.
- Through Holy Baptism, God makes us the body of Christ.
- Holy Baptism is God's free gift to us.

the

Source

A MEMBER OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

One of the most important ideas we Christians talk about is being a member of the body of Christ. Have you ever stopped to figure out what it means? What can it possibly mean to call yourself a member of the body of Christ?

A good place to look for the answer is in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. Read the passage. Then answer the following questions.

1. Through what did the Spirit make us one body? _____

2. Does the body consist of one part or many parts? _____

3. There are many parts, but one

4. If something happens to one member of the body, what happens to the other members?

5. Who is the body of Christ?

6. Who gives us our differences?

Paul, the writer of Corinthians, wants members of the church to think of themselves as if they were a body. The parts are different, right? What would a body be like if everything had to be a nose or a big toe? If a body did not have its different parts, it would be pretty useless. The differences are not just okay, but essential!

Paul wants us to realize that when we are baptized, we are made a part of the body of the church. More than that, Paul teaches us that the church is the risen body of Christ in the world. So, when we say we are members of the body of Christ, we are saying that through Baptism we are part of the body and we each bring our differences to play our important role in the body. And, we are saying that God does all this as a gift to us. There is not one thing we have to do or be or say. It is all in God's hands! We belong to the body of Christ because God wants us.

Our differences are God's way of distributing divine gifts.

WHAT DOES MARTIN LUTHER SAY?

Find the section of the Small Catechism on Baptism that is printed on pages 171-172 of this book.

Luther's first questions are "What is Baptism?" and "What is this Word?" Notice what Luther says about the Word. Do you remember from last session that the Word is God's power?

Luther's explanation about Baptism is that it is water used together with God's Word and by God's command. This sounds like what you learned before, doesn't it?

Then Luther asks "What benefit does God give in Baptism?" and "What is God's promise?" Underline the words that Luther says are benefits. Circle the word that tells what is promised.

You should have underlined the words *forgives sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives everlasting salvation*. The word *saved* should be circled.

Now, draw a box around all the things Christians must do to receive these benefits and the promise. How many things did you draw a box around? None? Right! Every one of these benefits comes to us in Baptism simply because God wants us to have them. We don't have to do a thing except receive the gifts.

WHO IS IN THE BODY?

How many different things can you think of that people do in your congregation? Together with your classmates, make a list of all the different things you think of that you do for the sake of the gospel. We call these activities *ministries*. All Christians are ministers who are called by God to use their gifts from God to perform their ministries.

Now reread 1 Corinthians 12:21-31. Every time Paul talks about a body part (like an ear) or a church body part (like an apostle) replace that word with a ministry from the class list.

Does it mean something different now that you have the new words in it?



WILLIAM A. ZUEHLKE

Did you find yourself in the new version of this passage?

Remember again how Paul taught the Corinthians that their differences are important. What would your congregation be like if everyone was a teacher? What things wouldn't get done? What if everyone had the gift of taking care of finances, but no other gifts. What would be missing then?

We believe that God creates us different from one another on purpose. Because we are all different, all of us are needed. Because we are all different, none of us can get along by ourselves. *Our differences are God's way of distributing divine gifts* so that we are all important.

CONFIRMATION BEGINS IN BAPTISM

If you are wondering what all of this has to do with preparing for your confirmation, the answer is that it has *everything* to do with confirmation! When you affirm your faith at your confirmation, you are actually affirming your Baptism.

Those who were baptized as babies or young children didn't have any idea of what was going on. That doesn't matter. Since God is giving the baby the gift of a relationship, the baby doesn't need to know what's going on. It is all God's doing.

But, it shouldn't stop there. Somewhere along the line, it is important to say to God something like, "Thank you for the wonderful gift of a relationship with you. I'll do everything I can to treasure this gift, enjoy it, and use it wisely." That's what confirmation is. It is our answer to God's gift of our Baptism. We save our answer until we are old enough to begin to understand what God has given us.

In *Lutheran Book of Worship*, the baptismal service and the confirmation service (affirmation of Baptism) are very similar. Look at both services in *LBW*. Holy Baptism is printed on pages 121-125 and the Affirmation of Baptism (with portions for confirmation) is printed on pages 198-201. What things are the same? What things are similar,



Through Holy Baptism, God makes us the body of Christ.

but a little different? What things are very different?

Remember, *through Holy Baptism, God makes us the body of Christ*. Through the rite of affirmation of Baptism (confirmation), We say "yes!" to what God has given us.

IT'S FREE!

Think about the following questions.

1. If you have been baptized, do you know the date of your Baptism? If not, somebody can probably help you find a certificate or some other reminder. How old were you? Did you know what was going on? Who was there?

2. Why do you think God would give this most important gift to people who don't even know what's going on? Why do you think we say that *Holy Baptism is God's free gift to us*?

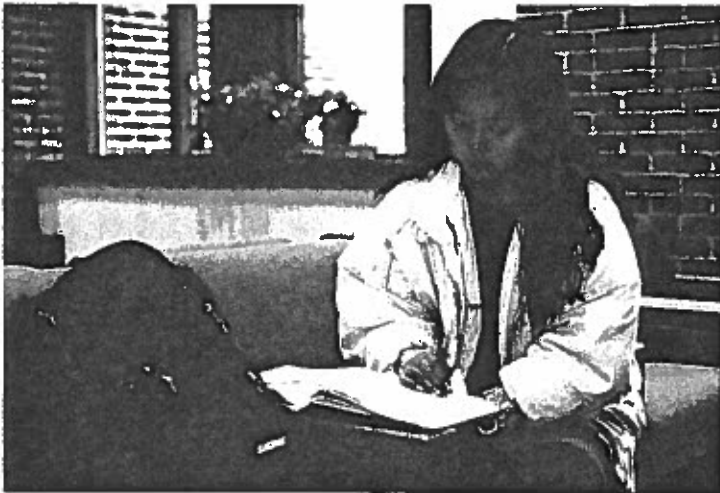
3. If Christians believe that in Baptism God brings us into God's family—differences and all—why do you think some Christians exclude others because of those same differences? If you were a leader of the church, what would you say to church people about their differences?

Shaping life

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Read the following situations. Think about each one. Who is being excluded in each one and why? What are some possible solutions?

- Jerry was in an auto accident a few years ago and now uses a wheelchair. His church has many steps and if Jerry wants to worship, someone must carry him and his wheelchair. This embarrasses Jerry and he only goes to church now on special days like Christmas and Easter.



JEFF GREENBERG

**Holy Baptism
is God's free
gift to us.**

- Kim came to North America as a refugee from Southeast Asia. People at a church helped Kim and her family get settled in their new country. Kim feels that many young people her age treat her differently. It is not that they are mean to her, they just never invite her over to their homes or out to the movies with them.

- Sonia is very shy. She wishes she wasn't shy because she thinks she would have more friends. She has tried to be just like the others, but the harder she tries, the more she feels like she messes up. Sonia would like to be anybody but herself. So, she sits in her room most of the time and reads her books and wonders what the other kids are doing.

BELONGING

People with different backgrounds always have much to share with others. Take, for instance, the following story that is told by some Native North Americans about their first encounter with Christianity. As you read it, look for what the missionary taught the chief and what the chief taught the missionary.

"This missionary came out into Indian country, settled in with one tribe, and began to work first of all, and many

FURTHER

opportunities

Bible Reading and Reflection

Read Matthew 3:13-17. This is the story about Jesus' baptism as told by Matthew. Reflect for a few minutes each day about what it means to us that Jesus was baptized.

Memory

Find Parts 1 and 2 of Martin Luther's explanation of Holy Baptism (see page 171 of this book). Work each day this week to memorize the explanations. If you stick to it and do a little each day, you will have Parts 1 and 2 memorized by your next class.

Activity 1

Learn about your own Baptism by locating your baptismal certificate and anything else that may have been saved from that day. Then talk to someone who remembers your baptismal day. Find out as much as you can about the day. Write a brief account of your Baptism from the information you gather. Now, when your baptismal anniversary arrives, display the certificate, the story, and anything else you located in a prominent place for a few days.

missionaries did, on the tribe's leadership. After many long and patient months of conversations, the missionary finally won the conversion of the chief. With great excitement the missionary planned a great celebration for the chief's Baptism the following Sunday in the little church that he had built but had not yet begun to fill. The missionary was more shocked than surprised when the chief showed up with the entire tribe expecting that all of them would be baptized together into this new religion. Of course, the mis-

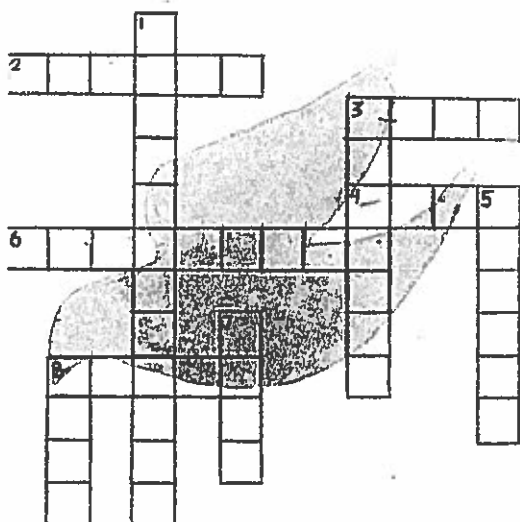
sionary tried to explain that he could not baptize all those people, because they were not yet Christians; they had not yet been instructed and had not yet learned to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Not understanding, the chief responded that they would all learn soon enough. When the missionary finally refused, the chief sadly said that he too would have to wait until all of his people were ready and acceptable before he would be baptized. We live together, we work together, we pray together, and either we become Christian together or we will not become Christian at all."

From RIVERS OF LIFE: NATIVE SPIRITUALITY FOR NATIVE CHURCHES by Paul Schultz and George Tinker, copyright © 1988 Publishing House of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.



Activity 2

Complete the crossword puzzle to review the session.



ACROSS

2. We _____ to the body of Christ.
3. In Baptism we are made members of this.
4. Apostle who taught the Corinthians about being a body.
6. What Baptism is.
8. We are baptized with _____ and the Word.

DOWN

1. Our response to Holy Baptism.
3. "I _____ you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."
5. He wrote the Small Catechism.
7. The cost of Baptism.
8. We are baptized with water and the _____.

FOCUS

ON A DIFFERENCE IN PAUL

Baptism was a major turning point in the life of the apostle Paul. Before baptism and the beginning of his relationship with God, Paul took pride in being harsh with the brand new church and its people. He was even in on the killing of Stephen, the first Christian to die for the faith. You can read about that in Acts 7:58—8:1. (He was called *Saul* before his name was changed to Paul.)

But later, God called Paul to be a follower and everything changed. First, Paul was baptized. Then he worked hard to build up the church he had been trying to get rid of. In the end, Paul probably did more to help the young church than any one else!