



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.



## **2013 Churchwide Assembly Bible Studies**

### **Community Conversations with Isaiah, Luke, 2 Corinthians, and Revelation**

Welcome to the 2013 Churchwide Assembly Bible studies, four days of community conversation centered in God's written word. In our time together we will be gathering around four passages that help us explore our assembly and anniversary theme: Always being made new, 25 years together in Christ.

We will gather together each day from Tuesday, August 13 through Friday, August 16 in small groups led by our synodical bishops, synodical vice-presidents and others. Voting members, visitors, and staff are all welcome. Folks gathered in small groups throughout the church are welcome to join as well.

The pattern of the four days will be as follows. Each day we will begin by listening to a reading of the chosen passage. On Tuesday and Thursday we will also participate in a musical reflection on the passage led by Agape (David Shearer, <http://www.hiphopoutreach.com/#/who-is-agape>), a wonderful Christian hiphop artist. The remainder of the time will be spent in small group conversation.

One way to share insights from one group to another is for groups or individuals, whether present at the assembly or participating in the Bible conversations in your own settings, to tweet reflections to #bookoffaith.

Each day we will be rooted in the tradition by exploring one biblical passage undergirded by a quotation from Martin Luther and a psalm verse, and accompanied by a variety of potential questions to aid the conversation.

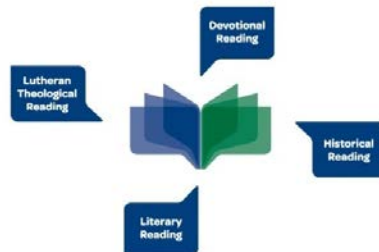
To help us with our studies we have two resources:

The first resource is this study booklet that contains the introductory materials as well as participant handouts for each day of biblical conversation and study.

The second resource (available online) contains more in-depth background material for each passage intended for leaders and any others who wish to prepare for each day. The background material for Isaiah 42:1-12 was written by Wilbert “Wilk” S. Miller, pastor of First Lutheran in San Diego, California. The material for Luke 22:14-23 was written by Dirk Lange, professor of worship at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. The material for 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 was written by Julia Fogg, professor of New Testament scholar at Pacific Lutheran University and a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) pastor who also serves as pastor at Messiah-Messias Lutheran Church in Pasadena. Preliminary work for 2 Corinthians was prepared by David Vásquez, campus pastor at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. The material for Revelation 21:1-6 was written by Peggy Wuertele, pastor and Coordinator for Missional Leadership, Region 7. Further bibliographic information is available at the end of each of the background pieces.



In the ELCA’s Book of Faith initiative we have found that biblical engagement is greatly enriched by the use of “multiple methods” in conversation with the text and other individuals. The suggested “methods” have centered on [four different ways of reading the Bible](#) and asking questions: devotional, historical, literary and Lutheran theological reading.



**Devotional reading** invites all of us to set aside our expertise or our lack of knowledge and invite the passage from the Bible to seep into our hearts, minds and souls both personally and in community. **Historical reading** grows out of the understanding that our Bible is, among many other things, an ancient text, written in a different time and place, by and for folks with sensibilities and experiences quite different from our own. We can gain insights for our present context through better understanding the ancient context. A **literary reading** is one in which we look at a text as a written text and we attend to the details and nuances of the text, believing that meaning can be found deeply within the text. A **Lutheran theological reading** brings questions to the text rising out of particular insights from our Lutheran heritage that can help us engage the Bible anew in each time and place.

The writers of this year’s Bible studies, each in their own way, have developed questions based on these different sorts of readings. They have also put an emphasis on missional reading and questions hoping that our conversations help us to envision a future direction for the church in which we are “always being made new.” In these four days, we suggest that each group begin with some devotional questions such as

- **What word or phrase strikes you, and where does it take you?**
  - **What images, stories, or memories come to mind?**
- and then move into the questions suggested by each Bible study writer.

## ***Respectful Communications Guidelines***

R = take **Responsibility** for what you say and feel without blaming others

E = use **Empathetic** listening

S = be **Sensitive** to differences in communication styles

P = **Ponder** what you hear and feel before you speak

E = **Examine** your own assumptions and perceptions

C = keep **Confidentiality**

T = **Trust** ambiguity, because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong

Eric Law, Kaleidoscope Institute, [www.kscopeinstitute.org/index.html](http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/index.html)

**Tuesday, August 13**  
**A Biblical Conversation with Isaiah 42:1-12**

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|--|--|
| 1 Here is my servant, whom I uphold,<br>my chosen, in whom my soul delights;<br>I have put my spirit upon him;<br>he will bring forth justice to the nations.  | I have given you as a covenant to the<br>people, a light to the nations,   |
| 2 He will not cry or lift up his voice,<br>or make it heard in the street;   | 7 to open the eyes that are blind,<br>to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,<br>from the prison those who sit in darkness.   |
| 3 a bruised reed he will not break,<br>and a dimly burning wick he will not<br>quench;   | 8 I am the LORD, that is my name;<br>my glory I give to no other,<br>nor my praise to idols.   |
| he will faithfully bring forth justice.  | 9 See, the former things have come to pass,<br>and new things I now declare;<br>before they spring forth, I tell you of them.  |
| 4 He will not grow faint or be crushed<br>until he has established justice in the earth;<br>and the coastlands wait for his teaching.  | 10 Sing to the LORD a new song,<br>his praise from the end of the earth!<br>Let the sea roar and all that fills it,<br>the coastlands and their inhabitants.                                   |
| 5 Thus says God, the LORD,<br>who created the heavens<br>and stretched them out,<br>who spread out the earth<br>and what comes from it,<br>who gives breath to the people upon it<br>and spirit to those who walk in it: | 11 Let the desert and its towns<br>lift up their voice,<br>the villages that Kedar inhabits;<br>let the inhabitants of Sela sing for joy,<br>let them shout from the tops<br>of the mountains. |
| 6 I am the LORD,<br>I have called you in righteousness,<br>I have taken you by the hand and kept you;  | 12 Let them give glory to the LORD,<br>and declare his praise in the coastlands.   |

**Martin Luther, “Liturgy and Hymns” (LW\* 53:333)**

Of Psalm 96:1 (“Sing to the Lord a new song”), Luther writes,

*For God has cheered our hearts and minds through his dear Son, whom he gave for us to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil. He who believes this cannot be quiet about it. But he must gladly and willingly sing and speak about it so that others also may come and hear it.*

**Psalm 96:1** O sing to the LORD a new song;  
sing to the LORD, all the earth.

\*The abbreviation LW stands for Luther’s Works, American Edition, published by Fortress Press and Concordia Publishing House.

*Suggested Questions:*

1. Do the words of Isaiah 42:1-12 afflict you or comfort you? Why?
2. Given Isaiah 42:1-12, what new song might you, your congregation, your synod, and/or our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America sing? In your context, does the song need to be one of judgment or of hope?
3. Prophets always seem countercultural, singing a new song when others are perfectly content with the songs of the past. In your mind, who are the prophets today and what songs are they singing?
4. What song has sustained you in your time of exile? Or think of a song that upon first hearing was almost impossible to sing and yet with time became a source of comfort and uplift. What are some characteristics of these songs?

Feel free to share insights with others by tweeting reflections to #bookoffaith.

**Wednesday, August 14**  
**A Biblical Conversation with Luke 22:14-23**

14 When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. 15 He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; 18 for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." 19 Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 20 And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. 21 But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. 22 For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!" 23 Then they began to ask one another, which one of them it could be who would do this.

**Martin Luther, "Small Catechism" (Sacrament of the Altar)**

*"What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?" Answer: The words "given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sins" show us that forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are giving to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation.*

**Martin Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament" (LW 35:67)**

*By means of this sacrament [of holy communion], all self-seeking love is rooted out and gives place to that which seeks the common good of all; and through the change wrought by love there is one bread, one drink, one body, one community. This is the true unity of Christian sisters and brothers.*

**Psalms 85:10**      Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;  
   righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

***Suggested Questions:***

1. How do the challenges facing Luke's audience help expand our understanding of the Last Supper?
2. What difference does it make to an understanding of the Last Supper that it is one part of a whole farewell discourse?
3. If you were to create a painting of the Last Supper, what would it look like if painted according to Luke (as different from Da Vinci!)?
4. How do you encounter both law and gospel in the story of the Last Supper?

5. In your own worship practice, how could the meal look more like such a real fellowship?

6. How does Luke's account of the Last Supper and Luther's focus on forgiveness and reconciliation both root us in the tradition and insure that we are always being made new?

7. What does God's friendship as witnessed in the Last Supper imply for us and for a new creation?

8. What does it mean to be the body of Christ?

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**Thursday, August 15**  
**A Biblical Conversation with 2 Corinthians 5:17-21**

17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18 All this is from God, who **reconciled** us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of **reconciliation**; 19 that is, in Christ God was **reconciling** the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of **reconciliation** to us. 20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be **reconciled** to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**Martin Luther, On Christian Liberty (LW 31:360)**

*The works of a believer are like this. Through his faith he has been restored to Paradise and created anew, has no need of works that he may become or be righteous; but that he may not be idle and may provide for and keep his body, he must do such works freely only to please God. Since, however, we are not wholly recreated, and our faith and love are not yet perfect, these are to be increased, not by external works, however, but of themselves.*

**Psalm 90:16-17** Let your work be manifest to your servants,  
and your glorious power to their children.  
Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,  
and prosper for us the work of our hands—  
O prosper the work of our hands!

***Suggested Questions:***

***Theological and Missional Questions***

1. For whom are we taking a collection, and from whom are we ready to receive a collection? How is this work of sharing ourselves and receiving others part of God's new creation, reconciled in Christ?
2. To whom are we called to be guests?  
Who are the disenfranchised in our communities today, and how are we living out our reconciliation to one another in service to them?
3. How is the Spirit leading us into reciprocal sharing (suffering/affliction as well as consolation, reconciliation/forgiveness as well as boasting in one another) today?

4. To whom are we ministers of reconciliation?

Who is ministering to us in the church, and calling us to reconcile, and where, with whom?

Have each person draw their reciprocity circles and ask the following questions: With whom is their church sharing in suffering/affliction? From whom are they receiving consolation and with whom are they sharing consolation? It is through these circles of reciprocity that Paul says God's reconciliation works in the world. So God reconciles us FOR the ministry of reconciliation. But what is reconciliation? With whom do we need to reconcile and whom do we need to help move toward reconciliation?

How can the church embody Christ's reconciliation across cultural boundaries, in ecumenical circles, even across religious boundaries?

### **Devotional Questions**

5. How does Paul invite us, Christ's church, to be renewed in Christ?

6. Can you describe a new creation before you have created it? It sounds impossible, but we are often working to describe the church that God is calling us to be as God is creating us, and we often end up boxing in God's freedom to create without borders. In what ways can we help each other be lead in freedom, open to becoming, willing to see how God is creating us anew with new neighbors?

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**Friday, August 16**  
**A Biblical Conversation with Revelation 21:1-6**

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them as their God;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

5 And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” 6 Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

**Martin Luther, “Babylonian Captivity on Baptism (LW 36:67-68)**

*Baptism, then signifies two things—death and resurrection, that is, full and complete justification. When the minister immerses the child in the water it signifies death, and when he draws it forth again it signifies life. (...) This death and resurrection we call the new creation, regeneration, and spiritual birth. (...) For this reason, as soon as we begin to believe, we also begin to die to this world and live to God in the life to come; so that faith is truly a death and a resurrection, that is, it is that spiritual baptism into which we are submerged and from which we rise.*

**Psalm 46:4-5**

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy habitation of the Most High.

God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;

God will help it when the morning dawns.

***Suggested Questions:***

1. What early associations do you have with the book of Revelation?

When you think about this book, what feelings do you have?

2. What might be the message behind the phrase in verse 1, “and the sea was no more”?

3. Why might this vision of a new Jerusalem have been so powerful to the first readers?

4. How do these images speak to us about the way that God works?

5. What verses or images from Revelation resonate with you in worship?

Consider that the one who was seated on the throne (that is Christ) promises: *“To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.”*

6. What do you think people thirst for today? What does this church have to offer from the spring of the water of life?

Some years ago, the ELCA used a slogan “In the City for Good.”

7. What vision do you think God has for the city/community where you live? How does your congregation participate in bringing about a “God-vision” for the place where you live?

8. When you hear the words from the one who was seated on the throne saying, “See, I am making all things new,” where do you see signs of things “being made new” in your present?

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