



9. My life as a member of God's church

Christians rejoice over their membership in God's church

Introduction

Cooperation

Cooperation is defined as actions performed for a common purpose or benefit; joint action. Cooperation among the parts of an automobile or the instruments of an orchestra is important. Why is it even more important that there is cooperation among the members of the body of Christ? **We can do more together than apart. Souls are at stake. Dissension hinders our mission and reflects poorly on Christ, the head.**

If the car parts aren't working together, the car won't run. If the instruments of the orchestra don't perform together for the common good, there will be chaos. By themselves the individual parts or instruments are of limited value. The sum of the parts is much greater. As members of the body of Christ working together for the common good, we can accomplish things that we never could working alone. For example, we can start a school or send missionaries. The welfare of souls is at stake.

The Scriptures Say

1. Faith is very personal. However, we are not alone. What encouragement does the Holy Spirit give us in our lives of faith?

1 Corinthians 12:13 We were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form **one body**—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. **What is the “one body”? HCC. Traits: universal (catholic), invisible, saving, indestructible, marked, apostolic**

Matthew 18:20 Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them. **When people gather around the Word and Sacraments, Jesus is there.**

Ephesians 5:23 The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. **As Christians, we are members of Christ's body, the church.**

We are part of the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the invisible church. This is the church of all believers. We are part of the body of Christ. He is our head. He builds and strengthens this church through his Spirit.

2. Membership in the holy Christian church is essential for salvation. God's Word shows us that he blesses us also through membership in the visible church, groups of Christians who gather to use the Word and sacraments. List some of the blessings we receive as members of a congregation.

Hebrews 10:25 . . . not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. **Mutual encouragement, accountability, corporate worship**

Acts 13:1 In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. **We benefit from trained pastors and teachers**

1 Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours. **This passage includes references to two different churches. What are they? A visible congregation and the HCC.**

3. What insights do the following passages give about blessings we receive and opportunities we have for serving the Lord as members of the visible church?

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. **What does that look like? How to do? (apply law and gospel, identify spiritual gifts, point to God's promises, be present**

Acts 1:14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. **Pray for each other, worship and fellowship with one another. (LG's, SISTERS, Boards,)**

Joel 1:3 Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation. **(Christian education through SS, Catechism, LES, FVL) How many have the gifts to homeschool?**

Mark 16:15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." **Support missionaries, be missionaries supported by others. Houghton, Thailand, London**

2 Corinthians 8:1-4 Now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us **for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people.** **Reference to what? Offering for the poor in Jerusalem. Modern equivalent? CAR**

As we get to know our brothers and sisters in Christ, we become aware of opportunities to encourage others with God's Word when they face challenges in their lives, to pray on behalf of others, to support parents as they teach their children—perhaps through a Lutheran elementary school, Sunday school, or youth program—to support the synodical mission program, and to perform works of charity.

The Principles

Because the Bible clearly teaches the following truths . . .

1. I believe that, as a Christian, I am part of the invisible church.
2. I believe that, through my Christian congregation, I am part of the visible church.
3. I believe that membership in the visible church is a blessing to me and others.

Focus

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) What is a synod? “A road with”, “walking together”

CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS *Oversee doctrine and practice, calls, assignments, CMO*

- Synod president + 12 district presidents , *cong/worker care*

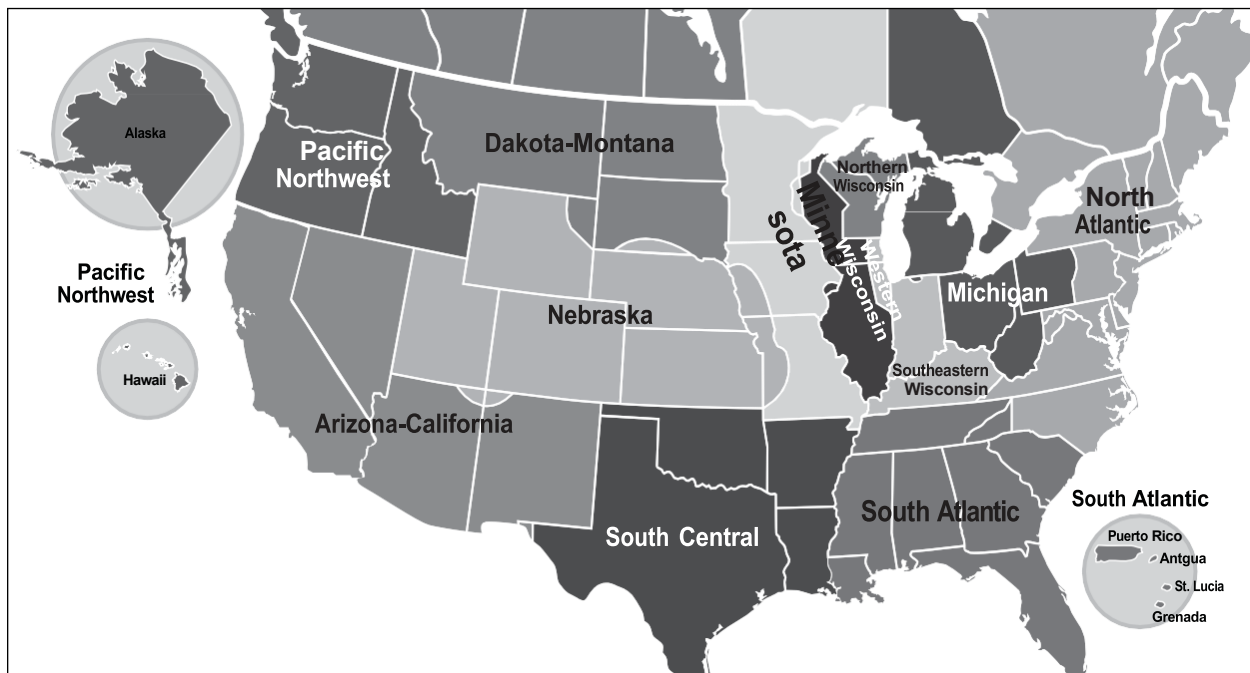
SYNODICAL COUNCIL *Carrying out convention resolutions, LR planning, fiscal soundness*

- Synod president + 12 lay representatives + **3 members of the Conference of Presidents** + 2 pastors and 1 teacher + heads of other areas of ministry

OTHER BOARDS

- World Missions, Home Missions, Ministerial Education, Finance and Budget

The Twelve WELS Districts



Each district is represented by a district presidium and circuit pastors.

MINISTERIAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS

- Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, WI (high school)
- Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, MI (high school)
- Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN (college)
- Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI (seminary)

HOME MISSIONS

- All 50 states

WORLD MISSIONS

- Asia, Europe, Africa, South America, North America

PUBLICATIONS

- *Forward in Christ*, WELS Connection
- Northwestern Publishing House

What Does This Mean?

1. We all have unique preferences and interests. How might God use these to build his church? **Thank God we are not clones!** He may instill in us a passion for certain areas of ministry so that we use our gifts with energy and zeal to accomplish his work.
2. Recognizing that God wants all people to be saved and that his ministry has many facets, we want to make sure that we don't neglect any areas of ministry. In fact, we remember that our passions, if not guided by the love of God, could hinder the growth of God's kingdom. We call that parochialism—the quality or state of being parochial, especially demonstrating selfish pettiness or narrowness (as in interests, opinions, or views). Give examples of parochialism that could hinder the ministry of a congregation. How can we thwart parochialism?

LES vs. PSI; Inreach vs outreach; elderly vs youth; home missions vs world missions; local support vs CMO; staff vs. equipment.

We work to thwart parochialism by studying God's Word, praying for guidance and wisdom, and remembering that God's ministry may be much broader than our own interests. He reaches souls through many different channels.

3. Sometimes we hear people speak about the synod as the people in Milwaukee. Why is it misleading to speak that way?

We are WELS. Though we have called and elected others to serve us and carry out ministry that our individual congregation cannot do, we are the synod.

4. Our membership in a visible church provides both blessings and opportunities. Try to think of seven blessings and opportunities we enjoy as members of the synod. How can we avoid taking these blessings for granted?

We benefit from highly trained pastors and teachers. We have access to doctrinally sound printed

materials. Our children have access to Christian education at some level. By using our time, talents, and treasures, we are able to support both foreign and domestic mission work, etc.

To avoid taking these blessings for granted, we can regularly pray for the various ministries, support them with our offerings, make use of synodical communications such as WELS Connection and *Forward in Christ*. We can host mission festivals, organize presentations by missionaries, find ways to serve within our local congregation, etc.