

Church Fellowship: Working Together for the Truth

Lamb of God Lutheran Church, Columbus, OH

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*Adapted from "Church Fellowship: A Bible Study Course for Adults,"
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Lesson One: Introduction to Church Fellowship

Church Fellowship, pp. 7-22

Goals

1. To briefly review the doctrine of the church as a necessary background to the discussion of church fellowship.
2. To define terms necessary for the discussion in the following lessons.
3. To become motivated to give careful attention to this important study.

Topics of Discussion

1. Introduction to Church Fellowship

Scriptural Principles:

2. Working Together for the Truth
3. Romans 16:1-19
4. The Unit Concept
5. Preserving and Extending Fellowship

Practice of Fellowship:

6. Guidelines and Basic Applications
7. Situations Dealing with Our Own Services
8. Working with Others

History of Fellowship:

9. The Early Church; WELS and LCMS Relations
10. WELS and CLC Relations; the CELC

- List any questions or issues you wish to discuss or ways in which you would like to see this outline expanded or contracted.

Introduction

- Read **1 Corinthians 2:2** and **Romans 3:28**. What is the most important doctrine of the Bible? Why?
- Read **2 Timothy 3:16-17**. What is another very important teaching of Scripture? Why?
- Some people outside the Wisconsin Synod consider the teaching of church fellowship to be its special trademark. Have you ever experienced this perception? Why do you think people think this?

The teaching of church fellowship is important for several reasons.

1. Church fellowship is a scriptural doctrine.
2. This doctrine is necessary to preserve the other doctrines of Scripture.
3. It was an important doctrine in the shaping of WELS.
4. It is a doctrine that is under heavy attack today.
5. It is a doctrine that often causes emotional reactions in members and prospects alike because it often affects their relationship with family and friends.

What is the invisible church?

- Read **1 Peter 2:9** and **Galatians 3:26**. Define the term *Church*. How does one become a member of the Church?
- Read **Acts 4:12**. Why do we say there is only one Church?
- Read **2 Timothy 2:19**. Why do we call this one Church the Invisible Church?
- Read **Isaiah 55:10-11**. How can we recognize the presence of this one Church?

What is a visible church?

- Read **Revelation 1:10-11**. What do we mean by the term *visible church*?
- Read **Colossians 3:16**. Make a list of reasons why Christians want to join a visible church.

Definition of church fellowship

Fellowship refers to friendly relationships between people and activities in which they work together to advance common goals.

Because of our membership in God's invisible, holy Christian Church and our membership in visible congregations and denominations, we enjoy various kinds of fellowship.

- Read **1 John 1:3**. What fellowship do we enjoy as members of the Invisible Church?

In an ideal world, every Christian would be able to express fellowship with every other believer. In our sinful world, however, we are not able to do this. Many visible church groups cling to teachings that contradict God's Word. For this reason we will want to keep our discussion of the spiritual fellowship we have with God and with all Christians through faith distinct from our discussion of the fellowship we have with other visible churches and their members.

Church fellowship is the term we use when we speak about fellowship between Christians in different visible church groups.

Church fellowship refers to

1. the doctrinal fellowship we have with all Christians who confess all the teachings of Scripture
2. the expression of this fellowship through joint activities

Definition: *Church fellowship* refers to every activity in which members of visible churches join together as an expression of their unity of faith and doctrine.

This is the topic of this study. On the basis of Scripture we will want to explore with whom we may practice church fellowship, how much agreement is necessary for church fellowship, and what constitutes an expression of a shared faith.

Summary

Through faith in Jesus Christ people become members of the one holy Christian Church. In this Church they enjoy fellowship with God and with every other true believer. Christians join together with fellow Christians in activities that promote faith and the spread of God's Word. The term *church fellowship* refers to every activity in which members of visible churches join together as an expression of their unity of faith and doctrine.

During the week

1. Read 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John. As you read, note how many times the words *love* and *truth* are used. Begin thinking about how these words are related.
2. Read Revelation 2,3. Notice how concerned Jesus is that truth in doctrine and life prevails in these churches.
3. Suggested Additional Reading: *Church Fellowship*, pages 7-31.