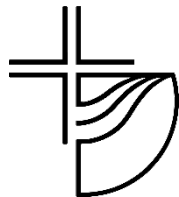


Compelling Vision

Together, as the Church of the Brethren,
we will passionately live and share the radical transformation
and holistic peace of Jesus Christ through relationship-based neighborhood
engagement. To move us forward, we will develop a culture of calling and
equipping disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless.

Bible Study Series

Session 2
Audrey & Tim Hollenberg-Duffey



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Focus Question

What binds us together in Christian community?

Scripture Texts

1 Peter 2:9-10; Colossians 3:1-4, 12-17

Focus Statement

Whose responsibility is it to bind the Christian community together? Does God alone bind us together? Or is the formation of a Christian community solely our responsibility? When we study 1 Peter 2:9-10 and Colossians 3:1-4, 12-17, we discover that God initiates binding the faith community together, and it is the responsibility of the Christian community to maintain this bond. Both God and the people contribute to the community that gathers in Jesus' name. Jesus Christ has called us into one body, but that body is not to be taken for granted. There is plenty of work for us to do.

Supplies

- Paper and pen or pencil for each participant
- Whiteboard or newsprint with markers

Media Suggestions

- **Song:** "The Body" by Steven Curtis Chapman
- **Videos:** "[1 Peter](#)" and "[Colossians](#)" by The Bible Project (YouTube)
- **Books:** "Forgiveness: We all fail and miss the mark" and "The Body of Christ: Community of Believers" from *A Dunker Guide to Brethren Beliefs*
- **Website:** World Council of Churches resources from their annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at <https://www.oikoumene.org/>

Reflecting on the Texts

Both texts for this week's study are about forming and maintaining God's community. 1 Peter 2:9-10 names the purpose and origin of God's community, while Colossians 3:1-4, 12-17 names how a community chosen by God should act.

1 Peter 2:9-10 contains several allusions to Hebrew scripture. First is a reference to the titles given to the Israelites upon their arrival to Mount Sinai. Before giving the ten commandments to the people, God consecrates the people, calling them a *priestly kingdom* and a *holy nation* (Exodus. 19:6). Second is a reference to the prophet Hosea who symbolically named his children to represent both God's judgment and God's restorative power. God commands Hosea to marry a "wife of whoredom" as a metaphor for Israel's unfaithfulness to their God. When they have children together, he names one Lo-ruhamah, which in Hebrew means "not pitied" (Hosea 1:6) and another Lo-ammi (Hosea 1:9), which in Hebrew means "not my people." However, when God reveals plans to restore Israel, their names are changed. God will have mercy on Ruhamah, and the ones God had called "not my people" would once again become God's people.

In using these allusions to Hebrew scripture, the writer of 1 Peter wishes to convey a similar purpose to the new community gathered together in Jesus' name. Those who believe Christ Jesus are people of a new exodus, having been freed through God's mercy from slavery to sin and death. They have likewise been consecrated and brought together to be God's people. At one time, they had nothing of significance to bring them together, but through Christ, they became a people with a sacred bond. As such, they are a holy community, consecrated like those who were first brought out of Egypt by God's mighty hand. Both the Hebrew people and those who bear the name of Christ are beneficiaries of God's salvation. Faith in Christ means adoption into a heritage, a family of God's chosen ones.

The Colossians text likewise reminds followers of Christ that they are holy and beloved of God. The author of this letter tells us that we have the responsibility to reveal Christ through our living. In doing so, we maintain the bond established by our new calling—our common heritage. The community that is gathered together in Christ's name is a gift. Its strength and unity are the responsibility of the ones who have been brought together. We maintain the bond by clothing ourselves with attributes that build each other up: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience (3:12). For this to be possible, we need to disrobe the things that weaken our bond: anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive language, and dishonesty (3:8-9).

Those who have already received mercy through Christ Jesus should be quick to extend mercy to others. And if there is any question about the attitude of Christ that binds us together, it is Christ's love manifested in his peace. A community that becomes one body is filled with gratitude, which spills over into genuine praise of God the Father.

Gathering

Choose one of the following activities to introduce the theme of today's session.

- *Option 1*—Discuss: The Church of the Brethren believes that baptism is an “initiation rite into the church, the body of Christ. . . .” (*For All Who Minister: A Worship Manual for the Church of the Brethren*). Why did you decide to engage in this congregation? Why do you continue in this particular faith community?
- *Option 2*—Play a round of “would you rather” to relax and gather the group. Have participants raise hands or move to opposite sides of the room as these questions are posed. Would you rather have one really close friend or ten not so close friends? Would you rather play dodge ball with or against your pastor? Would you rather cram into a stadium for a sporting event or a theater for a concert? Would you rather worship with ten thousand people or ten people? Would you rather be famous for your Netflix comedy special or your bestselling theology book? Would you rather spend time with someone who is genuinely kind but boring or someone who is fascinating but, at times, mean?

Discovering God's Story and Vision

Invite participants to listen to the texts in an attitude of prayer while you guide them in this meditative reading. Participants may close their eyes and bow their heads or have their Bibles open and ready to follow along.

God of the Church and these sisters and brothers, open our ears to hear these scriptures anew. We pause in silence and make room for your Spirit to flood our consciousness.

As we read 1 Peter 2:9-10, help us connect to your stories of creating community throughout the Biblical narrative.

[Read 1 Peter 2:9-10, then pause for a moment of silence.]

As we read Colossians 3:1-4, 12-17, help us make connections to experiences in our congregation.

[Read Colossians 3:1-4, 12-17, then pause for a moment of silence.]

Lord, come alive again in our community as we engage these lessons. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Exploring God's Story and Vision

Dig deeper into the texts using these questions.

- Consider the allusions in 1 Peter to Exodus 19:6 and Hosea 1:6-9. In these verses from the Old Testament, how does God bring people together? Share other biblical stories where God works to form community.
- Consider the descriptions for God's people from 1 Peter 1:9. What is the significance of each of these titles for the church? Which titles might hold special meaning for the Church of the Brethren and your local congregation?
- Both letters for this study were written to communities that were likely a mixture of Jew and Gentile. How do Peter and Paul attempt to unite these different cultures?
- Colossians 3:12-17 contains advice for maintaining Christian community despite conflict. What does this scripture teach us about forbearance? How and when ought it be used?

Responding to God's Story and Vision

Reflect on today's texts as you discuss the following.

- What stories are often told by elders about your congregation? What is it about these stories of God's activity among you that bind you together as a congregation?
- What patterns, traditions, or activities does your congregation participate in that maintain and strengthen this bond? How might your congregation better strengthen these bonds? Be specific.
- Invite participants to write a brief letter to the congregation in the spirit of Colossians 3:12-17. What themes would you emphasize when writing to your community? What of Paul's advice translates well into your context? Encourage participants to read their letters aloud and discuss similarities and differences.

Empowered by God's Story and Vision

To wrap up, choose one of these activities.

- *Option 1*—Churches are a network of relationships. Each of us plays a role in the health of our union. What is one piece of advice from Colossians 3:12-17 that you need to practice more deeply in your relationships? How might you add habits and disciplines to your life that contribute to this practice?
- *Option 2*—Write a community covenant outlining the responsibilities of God and the people for maintaining a unified community. This covenant will not be a perfect statement but allow it to help you explore specific ways your congregation can grow into a healthier community. There is always room to grow. Work on this activity as a group, utilizing a whiteboard or newsprint. A covenant could look like this: "We are the Body of Christ, seeking to be united in purpose and mission. We believe God has made us one body by. . . . In pursuit of such unity, we believe it is our responsibility to. . . ."

Sending

Join in a closing prayer from the World Council of Churches materials for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2021.

*Holy Spirit,
vivifying fire and gentle breath, come and abide in us.
Renew in us the passion for unity,
so that we may live in awareness of the bond that unites us in you.
May all who have put on Christ at their baptism,
unite and bear witness together to the hope that sustains them.
Amen.*