



# The Body of Christ

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## Opening Prayer

Merciful God, we humbly implore You to cast the bright beams of Your light upon Your Church that we, being instructed by the doctrine of the blessed apostles, may walk in the light of Your truth and finally attain to the light of everlasting life: through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Merciful Father, through Holy Baptism You called us to be Your own possession. Grant that our lives may evidence the working of Your Holy Spirit in love, joy peace, patience, kindness goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, according to the image of Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

## How would you summarize this passage?

The Apostle Paul uses a well-known metaphor to talk about the people of God, describing the many different people as the Body of Christ. Regarding verse 12, John Chrysostom, an early Church Father, says, "Paul talks about Christ when perhaps he might well have said the church. In doing so, he raises the level of discourse and appeals more and more to the hearers' sense of awe" ([Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 30.1](#)). We could say that the Lord wants us to think in bigger ways about the Church.

## How does God's Word challenge us to think beyond ourselves in 1 Corinthians 12?

The body doesn't consist of one member but of many. People play different roles within a congregation. And while the temptation might be to try to figure out what role you play, God's Word encourages us to think about **others** in this text. We are to see the value and the benefit of what others are doing. The foot should appreciate the hand and not be jealous. And the eye shouldn't look down on the hand. The different parts of the body should be thinking of the others so much that "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (v. 26).

## How should we understand the word "member" in 1 Corinthians 12?

Today the word "member" might make you think of belonging to a health club. In that arrangement, you simply pay your dues so that you can use the facility. But the health club doesn't belong to you. You aren't particularly concerned with the same issues that the owner of the health club would be concerned with. You just want to use the treadmill, weights, or swimming pool.

However, to be a member of a church as Paul describes membership in 1 Corinthians 12 is much more significant. You are part of something much bigger. You have an important role and part that others are depending on. And you depend on others to fulfill their role and part (not that you get to tell them what their part is). This is much different from just working out next to people. You are working **together** with other people. And you're all to be concerned about and rejoice in the same things.

## Of what Church are you a member?

Participants might list their local congregation, which is good. They are each important members working together with others in their local congregation. The conversation should also address the local congregation's membership in a larger Lutheran church body: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. As

members of the the Missouri Synod, local congregations are to be working together with and partnering with other congregations in the LCMS. Ultimately, we are all members of Christ's Church.

Another quote from John Chrysostom is relevant here: "The Corinthian church was not the whole body by itself but was part of a worldwide community of faith. Therefore the Corinthians ought to be at peace with the church in every other place, if it is a true member of the body" (Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 32.1).

Note: As we talk about being members of Christ's Church, the question might be asked about partnerships with non-LCMS churches. It might be best to answer this question by talking about different levels of partnerships. We are in full partnership with congregations of the LCMS and many partner churches across the world. We describe this as "altar and pulpit fellowship." There are no limits to these kinds of partnerships. For congregations that aren't in "altar and pulpit fellowship," less formal partnerships are an option. Many congregations participate in these kinds of partnerships through local food banks and other projects for the good of their local community. On a national level, our Synod's work with other church leaders on life issues and religious freedoms would be another example of the larger Church working together in these less formal partnerships.

### **What have you learned about partnerships in the Gospel from this passage or study?**

The hope is that participants will acknowledge that they are "members" and part of the Body of Christ. This should foster a positive attitude about not only working with other members in their congregation, but also working with other member churches of the LCMS in their area.

### **What can you or your congregation do to work with other "members," considering this Word from God?**

Answers will vary. This might range from holding some joint activities with a neighboring LCMS church to forming an official congregational partnership.

### **With whom can you talk about ways to promote partnerships in the Gospel?**

Answers will vary. This might involve talking to other churches or leaders in the community about how a congregation can work together with others to benefit the community. It might involve conversations with leaders of area LCMS congregations about a joint activity like a youth event, a retreat for some different groups in the church, or hosting a seminar or circuit forum. Finally, conversations might be had with area pastors, elders, or council members of other area LCMS congregations about exploring a formal partnership arrangement.

### **Closing Prayer**

Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.