

The Divine Service

The Divine Service is not a marketing tool, not an “outreach event,” and not a strategy. It is “mission”-ary because **is the fulfillment of the “Mission” Work Jesus sent His Church to do. God’s Service to us in Word and Sacrament is Christ coming to us through His instituted means.**

1. It Is Public by Nature

The Church does not gather privately. The Service is announced publicly. The doors are open. The Word is spoken aloud., The Gospel is not hidden knowledge.

2. The True God is Addressed

With the invocation of the Triune God, the hearer is directed to the true God in whom we trust.

3. Law and Gospel Are Proclaimed Every Time

A. The Law (missionary necessity)

After the Invocation, the Service begins with Confession of sins and Kyrie (“Lord, have mercy”). This confronts every hearer with God’s holiness, human sin, the need for mercy. An unbeliever who hears this learns immediately that Christianity is about sin and mercy, not self-improvement.

B. The Gospel (missionary proclamation)

The Service does not merely talk about forgiveness, suggest hope, or invite reflection. It declares: “I forgive you all your sins...” That is an objective Gospel proclamation, whether one believes it yet or not.

4. The Readings and Sermon Are Missionary Speech

Scripture is read publicly: Old Testament, Epistle, Holy Gospel. The sermon, when faithful, is direct evangelism, even if delivered to a mostly baptized congregation. Romans 10: “Faith comes from hearing.”

5. The Creed Is Missionary Confession

The Creed is not a membership pledge. It is a public confession spoken aloud before the world.

6. Prayer Is Evangelistic Witness

The Church prays for the world, rulers, suffering, and the lost. The prayers themselves are a testimony of the church’s trust.

7. The Sacraments

A. Baptism: When Baptism occurs in the Service, the Gospel is enacted visibly.

Acts 2:38, “Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

B. The Lord’s Supper: The Supper is not outreach, but it is missionary by contrast.

1 Corinthians 11:26, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.”

Closed Communion.--It draws people toward catechesis, so that they might be able to receive worthily.

8. The Service Teaches Without Explaining Itself

The Divine Service does not apologize for reverence or seriousness.

9. Why the Divine Service Often Feels “Non-Missionary”

Because it refuses entertainment and manipulation. It trusts Christ to work through His Word.

10. One Sentence Summary

The Divine Service is missionary because it publicly places sinners under the living Word of Christ and delivers forgiveness in His name—without asking permission or tailoring the message to demand.

11. Luther’s Own Way of Saying It: “The Church is the mouth-house of God.”

Luther's Small and Large Catechism

“The deplorable moral wretchedness which I recently witnessed, when I visited your parishes, has impelled me to publish **this Catechism, drawn up in a very simple and brief form.**”

Luther wrote it as a summary of the Christian faith for the unlearned. But it is often used as a tool for bringing people into the Church and keeping them in the Church. “The people, especially those who live in the villages, and even curates for the most part, possessing so little knowledge of the Christian doctrine....” “For although I agree that no one can or ought to be forced to believe....” (Small Catechism)

The catechetical structure of the first three parts is Law first, second Gospel, and then the trusting response to the Word in Christian prayer (Calling on the name of the Lord).

The second three parts order the sacraments in chronological order: Holy Baptism gives a spiritual birth, confession and absolution is the repentant life of the Christian, Lord’s Supper is the highest communion of the believer with Jesus Christ. The goal is incorporation or fellowship with the Church, the body of Christ. **“But we, for the purpose of instructing the common people, shall be content with these three parts...”** (The Shorter Preface of Luther’s Large Catechism).

The Catechism as a Missionary Map

1. The Ten Commandments

The Law is to reveal sin, God’s will, and the need for a Savior. The Law applies to all people, not just Christians. Preparation for the Gospel

2. The Creed

The Creed proclaims who God is and what He has done for us in Christ. The Creed teaches the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. It is pure Gospel, usable for first hearing. Yet it also becomes the Church’s ongoing confession.

3. The Lord’s Prayer

Prayer is the life of faith expressed. The Lord’s Prayer teaches believers their need and then what to ask for and how to pray as God’s children. You can only pray “Our Father” by faith.

4. Holy Baptism

Holy Baptism delivers forgiveness, life, and salvation. (Entrance into the Church)

Holy Baptism signifies the Baptismal life of the Christian. (Eph 4:20-24)

“But the act or ceremony is this, that we are sunk under the water, which passes over us, and afterwards are drawn out again. These two parts, to be sunk under the water and drawn out again, signify the power and operation of Baptism, which is nothing else than **putting to death the old Adam**, and after that **the resurrection of the new man**, both of which must take place in us all our lives, so that **a truly Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism**, once begun and ever to be continued. For this must be practiced without ceasing, **that we ever keep purging away whatever is of the old Adam, and that that which belongs to the new man come forth**” (LC IV 65).

5. Confession and Absolution

The Confession of Sins is followed by the announcement of the absolution -Gospel application.

6. The Sacrament of the Altar (And Christian Questions with their Answers)

The pastor admits to the table those who confess the Christian faith. 1 Corinthians 11:26, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.”

Trinity Lutheran Church observes the Scriptural practice (*Eph 4:3, 2 John 1:10-11*) of communing only with those for whom their public profession of faith (congregational membership) is in agreement with God’s Word and the correct exposition of Holy Scripture as found in the Book of Concord (1580). All who desire to receive Christ’s Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins **are asked to speak with Pastor Henson before coming forward to commune.**

Trinity Lutheran Church is served by pastors who are members of **the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America (Eldona.org).**

--Those who are members of Eldona-affiliated congregations are welcome to commune after announcing to Pastor Henson.

--Those who are not members of Eldona-affiliated congregations will need to set up an appointment with Pastor Henson to discuss their public church membership.

The Lord’s Supper is celebrated at Trinity Lutheran Church in the confession and glad confidence that, as He says, our Lord gives into our mouths not only bread and wine but **His very body and blood to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of sins and to strengthen our union with Him and with one another.** Our Lord invites to His table those who trust His words, repent of all sin, and set aside any refusal to forgive and love as He forgives and loves us, that they may show forth his death until He comes.

Those who are not yet invited to receive the Sacrament are encouraged to meditate on God’s Word in the distribution hymns and pray for the day when our divisions will have ceased.

7. Table of Duties, Daily Prayers

“Certain Passages of Scripture for various holy orders and positions, admonishing them about their duties and responsibilities.” The vocations in which Christians love their neighbor.

Modern Seeker models reorganize the Church's life around a very different logic than **Luther's catechetical one**.

1. Two Competing Organizing Principles

Luther's Catechetical Model

Organizing principle: God gives His gifts through Word and Sacrament

Movement: Law → Gospel → Baptism → Teaching → Absolution → Supper

The Church is shaped by what God does.

Modern Seeker Model

Organizing principle: Lower barriers so the unchurched will attend

Movement: Felt needs → Relatable message → Gradual spiritual interest → Later instruction (maybe)

The Church is shaped by how people respond.

2. How Each Model Treats "Outreach"

Outreach in Luther's Catechetical Model

Outreach is proclamation.

- The Law is allowed to offend.
- The Gospel is allowed to sound exclusive.
- Christ crucified is central from the beginning.

Outreach assumes:

- People are dead in sin, not merely disengaged.
- Faith comes by hearing, not by comfort or relevance.
- The goal is church membership through public profession of faith and baptism.

The Catechism is used early, even with outsiders, because it tells the truth plainly.

Outreach in Seeker Models

Outreach is attraction and accessibility.

Typical assumptions:

- People are spiritually interested but turned off by "church stuff."
- Christianity must first feel safe, useful, and non-threatening.
- Doctrine, sacraments, and confession come later.

Thus: - Law is softened into "brokenness" or "dysfunction."

- Sin becomes "not living your best life."
- The cross becomes an illustration, not an offense.
- Catechesis is postponed until after "buy-in."

3. Mapping the Catechism Against Seeker Practice

Ten Commandments

Catechetical model: Used up front. Law confronts unbelief, idolatry, guilt. Prepares for Christ.

Seeker model: Often avoided in early stages. Fear: it will alienate seekers. Moral language reframed as "principles for better living."

Result: No true repentance, Gospel loses its necessity

Creed

Catechetical model: Proclaimed plainly. Christianity is defined, not hinted at. God acts objectively in history.

Seeker model: Creedal language minimized. Trinity often avoided or simplified. Emphasis on “relationship” without doctrinal clarity.

Result: Christ without confession, Faith without content

Baptism

Catechetical model: Central goal of outreach. God’s act, not human testimony. Entrance into the Church.

Seeker model: Often delayed or optional. Reframed as a public symbol of personal decision. Sometimes replaced functionally by “commitment moments.”

Result: Shift from God’s promise to human choice

Lord’s Prayer

Catechetical model: Prayer flows from Baptism. “Our Father” presupposes faith.

Seeker model: Prayer treated as a general spiritual practice. Language softened to avoid exclusivity.

Result: Prayer detached from sonship, God becomes generic

Confession and Absolution

Catechetical model: Regular, spoken forgiveness. Concrete application of the Gospel.

Seeker model: Rare or nonexistent. Replaced by vague assurances: “God knows your heart.”

Result: No certainty of forgiveness, Gospel becomes emotional rather than sacramental

Lord’s Supper

Catechetical model: Summit of inreach. Requires teaching, repentance, unity.

Seeker model: Often minimized, infrequent, or symbolic. Sometimes opened broadly to avoid discomfort.

Result: Supper loses its seriousness, Unity redefined as inclusion rather than confession

4. The Role of “Inreach” in Each Model

Catechetical Model: Inreach is constant and central. Teaching never stops. Faith assumed fragile and in need of care.

Seeker Model: Inreach is secondary. Discipleship optional. Many remain perpetually “seeking.”

5. Theological Consequences

Catechetical Model Produces: Christians who know what they believe, Confidence rooted in external promises, Churches centered on Word and Sacrament

Seeker Model Tends to Produce: Christians unsure of doctrine, Assurance tied to feelings or decisions, Churches driven by metrics and novelty

6. One-Sentence Contrast

Catechetical model: The Church adapts people to the Gospel.

Seeker model: The Gospel is adapted to people.