OUR CHURCH
God's Faithfulness: Past, Present, Future

a Brewed Theology conversation starter*

INTRO

While the church is a global, diverse, multidenominational, complicated, broken, and beautiful (among other things) glimpse of the kingdom of heaven, we're getting specific with this Brewed Theology and focusing particularly on your local congregation. Or, as it would be for you and yours, "Our Church." We've heard it said that the local church is the "front line" of the Kingdom of Heaven. While politics, global events, religious trends, and social issues abound and dominate the mediasphere, through it all, the local faith community – the congregation, the church – is where the majority of time, relationships, service, discipleship, and faith formation happens. Let's talk about your place in that.

This Brewed Theology will take a look at your current faith community – likely, your *church*. After thinking back to your own church history – in your current community or otherwise – you'll consider the past, present, and future of your congregation, wondering specifically about where God has been, is, and will be present.

If this isn't your first Brewed Theology, then the Homework on the reverse of this sheet will look a little different. Because the topic of conversation is "Our Church" (meaning *yours*), you need to do some of your own research (we can't provide a link to *your* church website, for example). There are some resources below, but take a few of the suggestions and run with them.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

What's your church history? Are you a lifelong, "cradle" Christian? Or did you come to faith (and the church) later? Why? What faith communities have you been a part of? Were they nourishing to you? Something other than nourishing? How would you define the church? What do (or should) all churches have in common? Have you moved from church to church? What prompted that? Looking back, can you see God's presence and/or faithfulness in the places you've been? What about in your present community? Have you ever considered God as present in the future – drawing everything closer to God? What are your hopes for your church or faith community's future? Do you pray for it?

BIBLE BASICS

Read these passages about the church.

- **Nehemiah 9** – After returning from exile, Ezra gathers the Israelites and tells them their story.
- **Hebrews 11-12:1** – The author of Hebrews traces God's story and faithfulness through scripture to now.
- **Acts 2** – Pentecost. The so-called "birthday of the church." Read the story. What do you notice?
- **1 Timothy 1:1-14** – The greeting of a letter to Timothy, thanking him for the faith passed down by his family.
- **1 Corinthians 12:12-31** – You (all) are the Body of Christ; many members with many abilities.
- **Philippians 1:1-11** – God will bring the good work begun in you to completion until the day of Jesus Christ.

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ESSENTIAL READINGS and VIDEOS* (click the **headings** for links to knowledge)

THE "MARKS OF THE CHURCH"

Martin Luther identified several key "marks" that defined the church. Can you find, count, and name them here?

FINDING A [YOUR] CHURCH (ELCA.org example)

If you've ever been "church shopping" (an often-used phrase, but one we dislike...as if church was a product on a shelf or a service to be subscribed to), then you know it can be a process. How do you go about finding a church? Or what to expect by visiting one? If you're part of a larger denomination, try to find out about churche near you, in your denomination. The link above is for the ELCA. Try it out. Try finding your church there. Or try your own denomination's resources.

YOUR CHURCH WEBSITE (NO LINK)

Your church probably has a website, or at least some internet presence of some kind. Go look it up. What can you find, or not find, on your website? Your social media page? What does your "About Us" page (or equivalent) tell you about your church? Anything surprising?

GOOGLE YOURSELF

Well. Maybe not *yourself*. But Google your congregation. (If you have a common name, like "First Lutheran," be sure to add your city. I.e., "First Lutheran Church St. Paul".) Where does your church show up? Any articles, videos, mentions, or otherwise?

FIND A CHURCH HISTORIAN WITHIN YOUR CONGREGATION

Maybe you are the church historian. If so, bring and share your knowledge of the congregation's past. If you're not the historian, matriarch, or patriarch of [your] church, find someone with more memory or knowledge than you, and ask them some questions about your church, like:

- What is your earliest memory the church?
- How were things different then?
- Why are you still part of this community?
- What are you excited about, that's happening now?
- What are you hopeful for into the future?

ATTEND A NEW MEMBER CLASS

How long has it been since you've been a part of your faith community? Maybe you've not technically a "member." Whether you aren't, or you are, consider joining the next new member class, orientation, or session, and just listen. (If you're a current or longtime member, get your pastor's permission first, please.)

We at Brewed Theology claim no authorship or ownership of suggested readings, the links provided, or their host websites. Links connect to their original sources. If a link is broken, please contact your facilitator or report it to brewedtheology@gmail.com. Homework readings are proven (at least in our minds) to boost thoughtfulness and conversation. While not required, they are highly suggested.

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