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We Are Connected:

Introducing the Lutheran Malaria Initiative

Bible Study



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Note to leader and participants: This Bible study searches through a number of Scripture passages, mostly from St. Paul, and through leading questions, seeks to guide the participants into the “thought world” of these passages. The study is designed to be carried out as a conversation between the leader and the participants. The questions are often not directly answered but are posed to point everyone to Christ and to the connection all believers enjoy with Christ and with one another. The leader will want to prepare by reading all the Scriptures ahead of time and by thinking through the line of reasoning in the questions. The focus must always be on Christ and His work for us and in us. We pray that all are moved by God’s Spirit to trust Christ alone and to serve our neighbor with Christ’s mercy.

+In the name of Jesus +

Introduction

Walter Obare is the 10th of 15 children. But of the 15, only Walter and four others actually grew into adulthood. Walter lives in the country of Kenya, in East Africa, and the 10 siblings who did not survive childhood all died of malaria. Today, Dr. Walter Obare serves as the Archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, a partner church of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. All who are baptized are united by an eternal bond with Dr. Obare and his people because we are joined together with them in one body in Christ, our Head. In this body “the members may have the same care for one another,” and “if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” (1 Corinthians 12:25-26). How will we suffer together with Dr. Obare and his people? How will we rejoice together?

This is the basic reason you and your congregation are talking about the Lutheran Malaria Initiative, a joint project of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Lutheran World Relief and many of our partner churches (and others) around the world and especially in Africa. Simply put, *we are connected*. In this brief study we are going to search a number of Bible passages to see how this is true. The questions we ask are designed to bring into clearer focus our connection in Christ and to one another.

Open with prayer that our Lord God might richly bless our time together in His Word so that our trust in Christ may be strengthened and that our love for others may be increased by His Spirit. Pray that God gives us eyes to see our brothers and sisters across the world who are suffering from malaria and hearts to know that they are connected to us in the body of Jesus. Pray that Christ's Spirit would stir us and give us compassion so that we respond to their needs with loving action. That's because...

We Are Connected...As Children of One Father

Recently I saw a poster in Africa that read, "We are all one color – red!" In other words, we are all "blood red," and there is one race, the human race. What does it mean, then, that Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father..." (Matthew 6:9ff)? What are the implications of St. Paul's message in Athens when we consider the suffering of people, whether nearby or in faraway places? God "made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place" (Acts 17:26). We are connected, as children of one Father. Not only that, but...

We Are Connected...in Christ Jesus, our Savior

Look up together Ephesians 1:1-10. What is God's plan and purpose in the world? How does He carry it out? Why is this needed?

You see, if your blood is red, you are of the human race. But that also means you need the Lord Jesus. What are the full implications of:

- Romans 3:19-20
- Romans 5:12
- Romans 11:30-32

All of us are “blood red people,” sinners through and through. None of us can stand before God on our own. Only in the blood of Jesus, God’s Son in human flesh, can we stand before God and live.

Now look up Hebrews 2:14-18. Jesus came and shared our flesh and blood, Hebrews says, in order to deliver us from death.

See also 1 John 1:7-9. Where is this passage often used?

Now shift your attention back to Ephesians. Read Ephesians 2:14-18. How is Jesus Himself our peace? What does it mean that we are reconciled in one body? How is this carried out today? See Ephesians 2:18-22 for your answer. Where are you “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets...?” What are the Gospel promises in this section? How does Ephesians 2:1-10 concentrate our confidence in Christ rather than anything we do?

Having said all that, what is God’s plan and purpose in the Lord Jesus again? (Return to Ephesians 1:10). Then look up Ephesians 4:15-16. We talk about “speaking the truth in love.” What is the truth that makes us “grow up in every way into Christ”? Who is our Head? Read Ephesians 4:4-6 and the whole fourth chapter of Ephesians.

We are connected to one another, in the Lord Jesus! It happens because...

We Are Connected...through the Holy Spirit

Most of us somehow know that “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3). In other words, it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can believe in or be united with Christ as our Head. But the Holy Spirit does not “jump us” in a dark alley at night, unawares. He comes in broad daylight through humble means that constantly bring Christ to us – His powerful Word, His washing in our Baptism and the food He gives in His body and blood.

Baptism

Look up 1 Corinthians 12:12-13. How many bodies does Christ have? How many “spirits” of God are there? How does He come? Compare Titus 3:4-7. See also 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Then return to Ephesians and read St. Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21. Where is the power he is talking about?

Word of God

That last series of Scriptures also causes us to think about the power of God’s Word. Think about how the Word of God is “living and active” in you as you look at each of the following passages:

- Hebrews 4:12
- 1 Thessalonians 2:13
- John 20:19-23
- 1 Peter 1:22-25

Holy Communion

Finally, what are some of the implications of our participation together in the Lord’s body and blood in Holy Communion? Make sure you read 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 before you respond. Consider also 1 Corinthians 12:21-27, especially verse 26, as you contemplate your answer. Communion fellowship is the highest expression of our fellowship with Christ and with one another here on this earth. It is a foretaste of heaven and the place where we see the body of Jesus here on earth. Thus the Spirit of God working through God’s Word, through Holy Baptism and in Christ’s body and blood, connects us to one another in an eternal bond in Christ’s body.

In Father, Son and Holy Spirit, We Are Connected

We are children of one Father, members of the red (human) race, but dying sinners one and all. Yet, in Jesus, by faith, we belong to the company of the forgiven. Forgiven, we also forgive and, connected to Christ in His cross, we are connected to one another in His body. He is our one Head and all who believe in Him are one body, for we are baptized in

one Spirit, energized by His powerful Word and nourished by His body and blood, given and shed for us.

This is our connection to Dr. Obare and to his people. The members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya and our other partners in Africa and around the world are united with Jesus and in Jesus are united with us. We are “blood brothers and sisters,” for we share the same human blood, we are washed in the same blood of Jesus, and we receive the same blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins.

How Does the Body of Christ Act?

So if Jesus is our head, and together we are of one blood, what do we, as the body of Christ, then do? How will we respond when one part of the body suffers? How does the body of Christ act? Read and think through the implications of 2 Corinthians 9:11-15. St. Paul’s intent was to take up a collection from the Gentile churches on behalf of the Jewish Christians in Palestine who were suffering from a famine. His purpose was to demonstrate the unity of the church in Jesus.

Connected in One Body: The Lutheran Malaria Initiative

The Lutheran Malaria Initiative (LMI) is a modern day collection for the unity of the body of Christ. LMI was adopted by 97 percent of the vote at our Synod’s 2010 Convention as a means for the people of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to reach out in the mercy of Christ to our partners around the world and to live out the fact that we are one body in Christ. We suffer together now. May we also rejoice together soon (1 Corinthians 12:26), when the scourge of malaria has, by God’s grace, been contained. Contributions to the Lutheran Malaria Initiative, given because Christ gave Himself for us, are a sign of our common life in Christ. They show we are **One Body** in the Lord Jesus. Our offerings for LMI, we pray, will strengthen our partners so that their churches will have the capacity to help fight malaria, and then to tell people why – because Jesus loves them with an everlasting love. Because Jesus wants to make them a part of His **One Body** as well.

We Are Connected...Conclusion

Here the group ought to reference more of the materials explaining the Lutheran Malaria Initiative. Find Dr. Obare's picture in the LMI case statement. What does he say about malaria and his family? Then read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 about St. Paul's collection. How is LMI seeking to accomplish the same goal?

Conclude with prayer: Pray for the Lutheran Malaria Initiative, for our partners around the world and for Lutheran World Relief. Pray that God's Word would comfort sinners with Christ's forgiveness and, once forgiven, would move us to works of mercy on behalf of people suffering from malaria. Pray for the witness of our partners. Pray that the day will soon come when we rejoice because the Lord has given us victory over this dreaded disease.

After all, **We Are Connected** – in Christ!

Rev. Herbert C. Mueller Jr.
First Vice-President
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
888-THE LCMS (843-5267)

www.lutheranmalaria.org

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