

# Making Christ Known

in the



**Northern Illinois Synod**  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

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## The Small Catechism

In celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, *Making Christ Known* has featured a series focusing on Luther's Small Catechism. We conclude this year-long series with Confession and Blessings.



*Different versions of the Small Catechism over the years*

## A Kinder and Gentler Confession

*NIS Bishop Jeffrey Clements*

I am sometimes amused by what has stuck with me for a lifetime. When I was a child, the Sunday liturgy did not vary much. There were two settings for Holy Communion in the Service Book and Hymnal, but we only used one of them. The Collect and Scripture readings were different each week. There was some variety in the hymns, although I think we sang "Holy, Holy, Holy" at least 26 times a year. But, everything else was pretty much the same, week after week, year after year. Even the sermon with its introduction, three points, and conclusion was formulaic.



One result of all those years of repetition was the memorization of large portions of the liturgy, which came in handy for playing church at home. The words actually became a part of who I am. It is funny, however, to note the parts that are still lurking in the recesses of my mind some 38 years after the SBH was retired.

My pastor favored the use of Public Confession. I recall the beautiful words of absolution. "Almighty God, our heavenly Father, hath had mercy upon us, and for the sake of the sufferings, death, and resurrection of his dear Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, forgiveth us all

*continued on p. 2*

## How People Are to Be Taught to Confess

### What is confession?

Confession consists of two parts. One is that we confess our sins. The other is that we receive the absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God himself and by no means doubt but firmly believe that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven.

### Which sins is a person to confess?

Before God one is to acknowledge the guilt for all sins, even those of which we are not aware, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. However, before the pastor we are to confess only those sins of which we are aware and which trouble us.

### Which sins are these?

Here reflect on your walk of life in light of the Ten Commandments: whether you are father, mother, son, daughter, master, mistress, servant; whether you have been disobedient, unfaithful, lazy, whether you have harmed anyone by word or deed; whether you have stolen, neglected, wasted, or injured anything.

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# Confession Isn't an Ending...

Pr. Joseph O'Donnell, St. Paul, Dixon

Confession - it's a strange anomaly. It's not a sacrament yet it carries certain sacramental qualities. Most of us probably think of corporate confession – when the minister reminds us and we quietly think of what we have to confess or mouth them hoping no one hears. I've wondered about confessing while trying to quietly secret away my sins so that no one knows.



But let's be honest, most ministers don't really leave much time for contemplation, and a lot of us are probably perfectly content with that. After all, it isn't about enumerating our sins and making sure we're right with God. God's grace is what God does, not us, and God's got this!

Now, the traditional Catholic understanding of confession, at least as my father, the former Catholic, taught me, ended with a promise never to commit that sin again. And more than one Catholic has told me about wondering why the priest ever believed it after the third or fourth time, even if they themselves sincerely believed this time would stick.

We have a similar problem with our form of confession. The minister absolves us and we're good, right? Hopefully, at least long enough to get through the day. Have you ever confessed a sin only to catch yourself repeating the same sin before the minister has even finished absolving you? I confess that I have.

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is what  
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So, if it doesn't immediately transform us and God's got this anyway, why even have confession? There are a variety of reasons and each comes with a debate, but I'd like to suggest another reason to consider.

For me it began with intercessory prayer. In the silent prayer time one day, I decided to intentionally pray for my enemies, followed by those with urgent concerns, then my nearest and dearest. I found that over time, I had a hard time remembering who my enemies were.

I didn't go through an active process of forgiveness, but the process of praying repeatedly, changed me. And isn't that what prayer is about? We don't change God with our prayers. It's not as if God was planning to be mean, and then someone prayed and God said, "well, since you asked, I'll be nice this time." Which means prayer is about changing us, the ones doing the praying. It's the conversation with God that helps us to hear God's will for us.

Is confession any different? In confession, we align ourselves to God's will through that conversation. Most of us don't think we hear God when we pray or confess, but I've begun to wonder lately if that voice that I think is mine, might not be:

"I had a terrible thought."

"Had a terrible thought?"

"I think it was a sin."

"It was a sin."

"Forgive me, OK?"

"OK."

Maybe it doesn't always line up this well, and it makes sense that I'm still out of alignment. We want to confess and be done, but confession isn't an ending. It's the beginning of a life transformed. †

A Kinder and Gentler Confession continued our sins. As a Minister of the Church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare unto you who do truly repent and believe in him, the entire forgiveness of all your sins: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

But more than these words of grace, I vividly recall the admonition that followed. "On the other hand, by the same authority, I declare to the impenitent and unbelieving, that

so long as they continue in their impenitence, God hath not forgiven their sins, and will assuredly visit their iniquities upon them, if they turn not from their evil ways, and come to true repentance and faith in Christ, ere the day of grace be ended."

I have wondered if my pastor took some secret delight in threatening the congregation with God's vengeance. I also wonder if the adults in the congregation heard

these words as the same kind of threat that I did.

Corporate Confession is kinder and gentler these days. Luther's Small Catechism keeps confession pretty simple, stating that it has two parts, confessing sins and receiving absolution. When the words of forgiveness are given to us, we are to receive them as from God. I hope our children hear words conveying God's grace often enough so that they become a part of who they are. †

# Blessings/Prayers from Martin Luther's Small Catechism

## The Morning Blessing

In the morning, as soon as you get out of bed, you are to make the sign of the holy cross and say:

“God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit watch over me. Amen.”

Then, kneeling or standing, say the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you wish, you may in addition recite this little prayer as well: “I give thanks to you, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have protected me through the night from

all harm and danger. I ask that you would also protect me today from sin and all evil, so that my life and actions may please you. Into your hands I commend myself: my body, my soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.”

After singing a hymn

perhaps (for example, one on the Ten Commandments) or whatever else may serve your devotion, you are to go to your work joyfully. †



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Photo by Matthew Kane on Unsplash

## The Evening Blessing

In the evening, when you go to bed, you are to make the sign of the holy cross and say:

“God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit watch over me. Amen.”

Then, kneeling or standing, say the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you wish, you may in addition recite this little prayer as well:

“I give thanks to you, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son,

that you have graciously protected me today. I ask you to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously to protect me tonight. Into your hands I commend myself: my body, my soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.”

Then you are to go to sleep quickly and cheerfully. †

## Table Blessings

The children and the members of the household are to come devoutly to the table, fold their hands, and recite:

“The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living creature.”

Then they are to recite the Lord's Prayer and the following prayer:

“Lord God, heavenly Father, bless us and these your gifts, which we receive from your bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Similarly, after eating they should in the same manner fold their hands and recite devoutly:

“Give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good, for God's mercy endures forever. God provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they cry. God is not impressed by the might of a horse, and has no pleasure in the speed of a runner, but finds pleasure in those who fear the Lord, in those who await God's steadfast love.”

Then recite the Lord's Prayer and the following prayer:

“We give thanks to you, Lord God our Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord for all your benefits, you who live and reign forever. Amen.” †



Photo by Brooke Lark on Unsplash



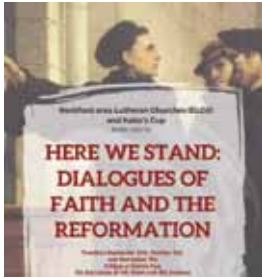
# Reformation 500 Anniversary Celebration Events in the NIS

Find out more details about each of these events at the synod website: [nisynod.org/category/reformation500](http://nisynod.org/category/reformation500)

## Here We Stand: Dialogues of Faith and the Reformation

**September 12, October 3, and November 7 in Rockford**

Rockford area Lutheran Churches (ELCA) and Katie's Cup invite you to *Here We Stand: Dialogues of Faith and the Reformation* on three Tuesdays: September 12, October 3, and November 7 beginning at 6:30pm at Katie's Cup on the corner of 7th Street and 4th Avenue in Rockford.



## Ecumenical Reformation Anniversary Celebration

**September 24 in Andover**

On Sunday, September 24 at 4 pm, an ecumenical service will be held at Augustana Lutheran Church in Andover to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. It will include portions of the Common Prayer Service compiled by the Liturgical Task Force of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity. The ecumenical commemoration of the 500 years of Reformation reflects in its basic liturgical structure this theme of thanksgiving, repentance and common witness and communion.

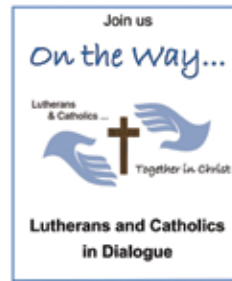


## On the Way - Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue

**Sunday, October 15 in Moline**

Lutherans & Catholics - Together in Christ. An historic event marking the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation on Sunday, Oct. 15, 2017

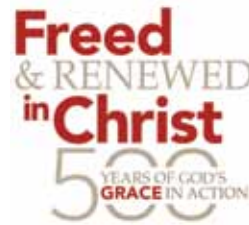
hosted by: First, Moline & St. Mary's Catholic Church Moline. United in our love for Christ, Lutherans and Catholics in Moline, IL, are coming together for an historic event marking the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.



## Central Conference Reformation 500 Gathering

**October 15 in Sterling**

An opportunity to commemorate together the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation, Sunday, October 15, 2017 at St. Paul, Sterling. 2:30 Presentation by Prof Wanda Deifelt: "The Legacy of the Lutheran Reformation and its Influence in Shaping Current Ecumenical Dialog and Partnerships" 4:00 Worship with Bishop Jeffrey Clements featuring a hymn-sing: "Through the Church Year with Martin Luther" followed by a light supper.



## A New Hallelujah: Reforming Our Song in the Spirit of Luther!

**October 21 in Monmouth**

First, Monmouth invites you to a music renewal workshop designed for church musicians, worship bands, choirs, pastors, congregational leaders, and members to help them: Experience a variety of heritage songs and new/contemporary songs that build musical bridges between generations; Learn practical skills as musicians to create a bridge-building music ministry and as leaders to obtain congregational buy-in; Embrace the importance of aligning their congregation's song with their mission field. Participants are

invited to stick around for an evening concert from 7 to 8 p.m. for workshop participants and the community to experience more bridge-building music in a worship environment. Pre-registration is required.



## Northern Illinois Synod-wide Reformation Ordination Worship and Celebration

**October 29 in Mendota**

Sunday, October 29 at 4pm at St. John's, Mendota. The special synod-wide Reformation Ordination Worship and Celebration will be Sunday, October 29, at St. John's, Mendota at 4:00 p.m. Rev.-elect Reed Peterson called to Augustana, Andover will be ordained.



## Making Christ Known

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The Rev. Jeffrey Clements, Bishop

Northern Illinois Synod  
103 W. State St.  
Rockford, IL 61101

815-964-9934

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Karin Graddy, AiM  
Communication Director  
[karin@nisynod.org](mailto:karin@nisynod.org)