

*Gathered*  
in Christ's name



*to Grow*  
in faith, love and obedience to  
the will of God;

*Sent*  
by the Holy Spirit

*to shine!*  
let God's love  
in word and deed



ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH  
IOWA CITY, IOWA

# Gathered to Grow—Sent to Shine!

## The meaning in the mission

Mission statements are supposed to be short so that they are memorable. But brevity can get in the way of depth and meaning. As short as our mission statement is, it is loaded with imagery and mission, and it helps us focus on our principal tasks as God's people:

- Whenever we gather, we gather in Christ's name. That is what it means to be Christian.

- The gathering of Christians is always marked by an ebb and flow, a coming and a going, gathering and being sent. We can be (and many people are) sent to do good works without any mention of God or faith. Likewise we can (and too often do) gather in Christ's name, only to return to our daily lives without understanding that we are sent to share the gospel of God's love with all those whom we encounter. To be sent without first gathering, and to gather without being sent are both contradictions.

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen*

*Go in peace, serve the Lord. Thanks be to God.*

The beginning and the end of worship

gathering of people who have been called out of the world for a purpose. The church is not called out to escape the world or to be saved from the world, but to be transformed so that we might go back into the world as God's agents of proclamation, compassion, and service. Worship functions much like the heart: as the heart pulls the blood out of the body, forces it through the lungs for cleansing and nourishment, and then forces it back out to renew the body, so does God draw us in, cleanse and feed us, and then send us back out to do our work.

# Sent

The use of the words **Gathered** and **Sent** place these two vital functions at the heart of our mission.

- **Gathered** carries the understanding that we are a *community of faith*, not just a collection of individuals who benefit by being with like-minded individuals. In an age when the art of living in community has largely been lost, we gather in the household of faith with people who are similar and dissimilar. Together we pray, share our joys and struggles, study the culture around us, listen for God's voice speaking through Scripture, seek to discern God's call to us, and engage in common ministry.

For the first three centuries of its existence, the church was not the identifiable institution we know; rather it was an intimate community that was very distinct from the surrounding cul-

# Gathered

To do either without the other diminishes God's ability to work in both.

The English word *church* comes from a biblical word that means an assembly or a

ture. This model community made the kingdom of God visible in both how it lived together and in what it did. Within the community, members cared for and supported one another, taught newcomers, and prayed for one another. As the community gathered around Word and Sacrament, they found the ability to hold one another accountable, and to offer absolution to the repentant. We are **Gathered** by God to live as a model community, a light set on a hill for all people to see. (Matt. 5:14)

- In the Small Catechism explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed ("I believe in the holy catholic Church"), Luther describes God's work in the church:

*Let the word of God dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

Colossians 3:16

I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common true faith."

**Gathered to Grow** represents Luther's teaching on the purpose of the church, that in it "God calls, gathers, enlightens and makes us holy."

- The opening address in the baptismal liturgy talks about what happens when we gather as God's people, be it in worship, small groups, or ministry activities: "As we live with [Christ] and with his people, we *grow in faith, love and obedience to the will of God.*" **Gathered to Grow** reminds us that God calls us out of the world to grow in faith, love and obedience to the will of God. Some of the ways that we accomplish this are through inter-generational small group studies, Sunday morning adult Christian education, confirmation, Hand in Hand (in-home faith formation) training, Sunday school, and mentoring adult baptismal candidates.
- Both **Gathered** and **Grow** reflect the charge given to parents and sponsors who bring others for baptism. Parents and sponsors promise to bring the newly baptized to worship, teach them the basics of faith, and give them a Bible so that, "living in the covenant of their Baptism and in communion with the Church, they may lead godly lives until the day of Jesus Christ." At the same time, worship and other activities of the "public" church are not the only venues for passing on the faith. We minimize the impact of faith when we think that everything has to happen in the church building. Our homes are as necessary for spiritual growth as are worship, Sunday school and confirmation.

*Grow*

- The baptismal liturgy shapes the second half of our mission statement through the simple act of presenting a candle to the newly baptized: “Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” From the first moment of our lives as Christians we are **Sent** to let our light **Shine!** *As the Father has sent me, so I send you.* John 20:21

- The Affirmation of Baptism (Confirmation) liturgy amplifies that which is to **Shine!** from our lives: the minister asks those who are affirming their faith, “Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in Holy Baptism:
  - to live among God’s faithful people,
  - to hear God’s Word and share in the supper,
  - to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
  - to serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus, and
  - to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?”

**Sent to Shine!** reminds us of this mission to the world in three simple words. As a congregation, our light shines through community service, mission trips, and companion relationships with Christians overseas. But we also strive to empower our members so that God’s light shines in our daily lives. The important work of faith is not only in what happens in our building, but that which happens in our lives through the gifts and interests God has given each of us.

- A study of faith development shows that adults who have mature faith are more likely to have been involved in service projects as children and teenagers. Their involvement in service as youth is a better predictor of faith maturity as adults than were memories of participation in Sunday school, Bible stories or worship services. The Youth and Family Institute reminds us that service needs to be more than just a youth activity; service is best done cross-generationally.

*Shine!*

- Our tag line from Psalm 50 says, *Out of Zion, God Shines Forth*. The psalmist’s message is urgent: The mighty one, God the LORD, will not keep silent. God will speak out from the most surprising places (Zion, a small hill in Judea) and through the most surprising people: the “least of these” (Matthew 25:40). **Sent to Shine!** reminds us that God not only wants to shine in our lives, God wants to shine out of our congregation and out of our lives so that all people may know “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:4). While the tag line lets others know what we are about, the mission statement is intended to constantly remind us what God calls us to be and do, and to give us a means of evaluating of our ministries. We use it in our printed materials, in our meetings, in worship and in teaching, to keep us focused on our principal tasks as Christ’s people:

**Gathered to Grow—Sent to Shine!**