



DYING CHURCH RISING HOPE

Higher Things Conference 2026

2026 Higher Things PRE-CONFERENCE BIBLE STUDY MASTER

What does the world think of when they hear the word “church”?

What do you think of when you hear the word “church”?

Let's take a look at a few Scripture passages:

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-3

How does St. Paul describe the church?

Those sanctified in Christ and called to be saints. He also speaks of the local church, called to be saints together in Corinth, and the Church universal in every place, both of which call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

ACTS 2:42-47

What is the church doing in this passage?

Devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, in other words, to the Scriptures; to true fellowship at the altar as they celebrate the Lord's Supper, and the prayers, the liturgy. They had all things in common, that is, a common doctrine and confession of The Faith. They were helping the needy. They gathered to hear the Word of God and celebrate the Sacrament of the Altar.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:27; MATTHEW 18:20; AND COLOSSIANS 1:18

Who makes up the church?

The individual believers gathered together around Christ Jesus, who is the head.

EPHESIANS 4:1-6, 11-16

What are the attributes that make up the church?

Humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, unity of the Spirit, bond of peace, unity of the Faith, and correct doctrine. The church speaks the truth in love.

What are the gifts Christ gives to His church here?

The apostles and prophets (God's word of the Old and New Testaments), evangelists (those who wrote the Gospels), and pastors who teach.

VIDEO #1

So, you have just been looking at some Scripture passages about the church. Let's go a little deeper in our understanding of the church from our Lutheran Confessions, starting in the Small Catechism.

Listen to how Luther talks about the church in the explanation to the Third Article of the Creed:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His Gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He forgives daily and richly all sins to me and all believers, and at the Last Day will raise up me and all the dead, and will give to me and to all believers in Christ everlasting life. This is most certainly true.

Luther expands on this in the Large Catechism. Listen again to how he describes the church:

But this is the meaning and substance of this addition: I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Ghost in one faith, one mind, and understanding, with manifold Gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms. I am also a part and member of the same, a sharer and joint owner of all the goods it possesses, brought to it and incorporated into it by the Holy Ghost by having heard and continuing to hear the Word of God, which is the beginning of entering it. For formerly, before we had attained to this, we were altogether of the devil, knowing nothing of God and of Christ. Thus, until the Last Day, the Holy Ghost abides with the holy congregation or Christendom, by means of which He fetches us to Christ and which He employs to teach and preach to us the Word, whereby He works and promotes sanctification, causing this community daily to grow and become strong in the faith and its fruits which He produces.

Notice that our understanding of the church is that this is all the work of the Holy Spirit, not us. The Holy Spirit, through the Word and Sacraments, makes Christians who gather in Christ Jesus to receive the forgiveness of all their sins and promises a resurrection to new life in this age and eternal life in the age that is to come.

Because this calling, enlightening, gathering, and sanctifying is all the work of the Holy Spirit and not ours, the Augsburg Confession boldly states:

Our churches ... Also ... teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.

This church, the church of God elect and glorious, cannot fail. Let's turn now to Matthew chapter 16 and continue to see what the Bible has to say about Dying Church Rising Hope.

READ MATTHEW 16:15-19

What is the rock upon which Christ will build His church?

It is the confession which Peter made, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Why can the "gates of hell" not prevail against this confession?

This confession comes not from "flesh and blood" but by the work of the Father. This confession, the rock on which Christ builds His church, is Jesus dying and rising for the forgiveness of sins, which robs Hell of souls, and cannot fail.

READ EPHESIANS 2:19-22

Who builds the church?

The Holy Spirit

On what is the church built?

It is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

This church is built on Christ Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, through the Gospel rightly taught and the Sacraments rightly administered. It can not fail.

But there are things in the church on earth, a church filled with sinners who sin, that must die, as well as things which must remain. Take a look at the list below. Draw a line through those things that must die, and draw a circle around those things which must remain.

Pride	Lust	Rising
Absolution	Praying to the saints	Sin
Processions	Jesus	Organ
Lust for Power	Creeds	Guitar
Pulpit	Artwork/Icons	Opinions
Skipping the Divine Service	Ties	Law
The Lord's Supper	Idolatry	Worldly Culture
Prayers	Hypocrisy	Gospel
Arguments	Teaching	Genuflecting
My wants	New Life	Higher Things
Confession	Head coverings	Lies
Screens	Good Works	Pastor
Sweat Pants	Dying	Suffering
Baptism	Church calendar	Kneeling

So there are clearly things which must be put to death and die within the church and our lives as Christians.

READ GALATIANS 5:19-21

What do these sorts of behaviors do to the church of Christ Jesus?

They destroy it, causing fights that break the unity of faith. See 1 Corinthians 3:3.

READ COLOSSIANS 3:3-8

St. Paul has a similar list here with more behaviors. What does he say must be done with them?

Put them to death.

So how do we put these things to death? Let's read the Fourth Part of The Sacrament of Holy Baptism. What does such baptizing with water signify?

It signifies that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a New Man daily come forth and arise; who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

How do we put sin to death?

Remember your Baptism.

READ ROMANS 6:1-10

What happened in your Baptism?

You were joined to Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Your sinful nature has been drowned and put to death. You have been raised from the font in new life joined to Christ Jesus.

There are also many things that must be retained in the church. Read the following passages to see what we must keep:

MATTHEW 28:16-20

Baptism and preaching/teaching are clearly instructed here by Jesus, but also Absolution and the Lord's Supper.

LUKE 22:14-20

The Lord's Supper

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-27

The Lord's Supper

ACTS 2:37-39

Baptism

JOHN 20:19-23

The Office of the Keys

2 TIMOTHY 4:1-4

Preaching

ACTS 2:42

The apostle's teachings, i.e., the Scriptures, and the Lord's Supper

MARK 13:31

God's word

COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

Paul gives a long list of attitudes and behaviors for the Christian in the church.

EPHESIANS 4:1-6

Humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, love, maintaining unity of doctrine by the work of the Holy Spirit, one Lord, faith, and Baptism.

JUDE 1-3

The Faith as delivered in the Scriptures to the saints, the church.

Go back and take a look at that list of things that should die, which you crossed out, and things that should be kept, which you circled. There should have been a dozen or so things that were not crossed out nor circled. Those items are things that are neither commanded nor forbidden in the church. Jesus never said, "You must stand up when you read from the evangelists," nor did He say, "You must kneel when you confess your sins." Most of what is in that list are things that are good and helpful for the proclamation of the Gospel.

For instance, it is helpful to have some sort of instrument leading the singing of God's praises. The organ is the most common instrument used in churches as it matches and supports the human voice well. Since it wasn't even invented at the time of the prophets or apostles, we are not commanded to use it and only it.

The same thing can be said of the church calendar year. It is very helpful to have a set order of seasons to lead us to remember our Lord's birth, Baptism, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension. It is also helpful to have special celebrations like Reformation Day or the Conversion of St. Paul to give God thanks for His continuation of the pure preaching and teaching of His word.

Luther instructs us to make the sign of the Holy Cross when we rise in the morning and before we go to bed at night time to remember that we are baptized into Christ. This is a good and helpful habit that is worth doing, but we should never look down on those who don't as less of a Christian than those who do.

So there are many things in the church and the life of a Christian that are not commanded in the Scriptures, but are helpful to keep our eyes focused on Christ Jesus. In these matters, we do well to heed the word of Saint Paul in Colossians 3, verses 15 to 17: And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

As we conclude this pre-conference study, let's look at a few more passages about Dying Church Rising Hope.

HEBREWS 10:22-25

What is the Day that is drawing near?

Judgement Day, the end of the world, and the beginning of eternity.

As this day draws near, what are you to be doing?

Holding to the confession of Christ Jesus as Lord, helping each other do good works, and meet together, that is attend the Divine Service to receive the Gifts of God in Christ Jesus.

EPHESIANS 2:4-10

What has God done for you in these verses?

Made the dead alive; saved us by grace; resurrected us with Christ; given us a seat in eternity with Christ; gifted us salvation; made us in the image of Christ; given us good works to accomplish.

ROMANS 6:1-10

We previously looked at these verses. We concluded with them again. What has God done to you in the waters of Holy Baptism?

Killed you, buried you, resurrected you with Jesus.

What happened to our old, sinful self?

It was killed by crucifixion with Jesus so that we are no longer enslaved to sin, set free from it.

What came out of the water with Jesus?

The New Man, set free from sin to live with Jesus, now and for eternity.

What must we do daily?

Remember your Baptism, that you are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

So every day, remember what must die — sin and all the trappings of the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh — and there is resurrection, new life now and for eternity in Christ Jesus, whom God did not spare but gave Him into death so that you are forgiven.

“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (Jude 24-25)

