



Christian Reflection
A Series in Faith and Ethics

Study Guides for

Membership

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to explore the nature of Church membership and its implications for the Christian moral life. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

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Institute for Faith and Learning
Baylor University
One Bear Place #97270
Waco, TX 76798-7270
Phone 1-254-710-4805
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Focus Article:

📖 Whose Body? Which Membership?
(*Membership*, pp. 11-18)

Suggested Articles:

📖 Tending Christ's Body
(*Membership*, pp. 73-76)

📖 Rethinking Re-Baptism:
What It Means to Be a Member
(*Membership*, pp. 77-81)

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Whose Body? Which Membership?

Although we recognize that “the family of God” and “the body of Christ” are important biblical images for the Church, it is not so easy for us to grasp how the Church today should live into them. One reason is that we tend to view our membership from an individualistic mindset.

Prayer

O God, who cried over Jerusalem, who knelt to wash dusty, unclean feet, who spit in the dirt when mud was what the blind man needed,
redeem our tears, our unwillingness to kneel, our hands caked with our own mud.

O God, who tells stories,
redeem our obsession with our own stories and our own problems.
Teach us to be a community who cries together, kneels together, gets dirty together, and tells your story together.

Amen.

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Meditation†

The Christian community is an organic unity in which the members are vitally related to each other through participation in a common life. By love they are bound together in a mode of existence which is the antithesis of the individualistic mode of existence that constitutes the “world.” Only in this mode do they exist as the creator intended humanity to exist....

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor

Reflection

The Apostle Paul stresses the *unity* of members in the body of Christ—when there are tensions about the diversity of their gifts and roles (1 Corinthians 12; cf. Romans 12:3-8 and Ephesians 4:11-16), or disagreements among them about the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 10 and 11). Notice the basic relational assumption of the image: the body is so intimately tied together that the members should “have the same care for one another” to the extent that “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1 Corinthians 12:25-26).

Michelle Lee-Barnewall traces some implications of viewing our discipleship in this way, as members of one *body* and as members of *Christ's* body.

- ▶ *Living as a member of a body.* The Greek philosopher Sextus Empiricus wrote, “in the case of unified bodies there is an affinity— if a finger is cut, the whole body is affected along with it.” Each body part is affected by what happens to the others. The Stoics had a term, *oikeiosis*, to describe how the parts of the body belong to one another. Likewise, “Paul recognizes that members of a body must realize that others are in their sphere of concern and so should be cared for because they belong to the same body,” Lee-Barnewall explains. She



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wonders, "Would our care for one another change if we acted not only because Scripture commands us, but also because we deeply desire to take care of what is a part of us?"

- ▶ *Living in Christ's body.* In the Church we are "not simply [joined] with others, but also with Christ," Lee-Barnewall notes. "Therefore, when we consider our actions towards one another, we should consider our union with Christ as well as our solidarity with one another." Paul mentions this when he objects to sexual sin (1 Corinthians 6:15-20). Also, when he warns against wounding the conscience of "weak" fellow believers and causing them to "stumble" into idolatry, he says this would be a "sin against Christ" (8:13).
- ▶ *Growing up into Christ, who is the Head.* Union with Christ through his body gives us "great hope that we can learn to care for and help one another, but we must admit that developing those relationships can be challenging," writes Lee-Barnewall. Admittedly, we gravitate to those who are like us; this can make the differences among members – in giftedness, ethnicity, gender, social status, personal woundedness, sinful tendencies, and so on – into sources of tension. "Unity in the Church is achieved not simply by the proper functioning of the gifted members, but when the members love one another as Christ loved them," she continues. "This love does not simply mean a superficial 'getting along' or a good working relationship, but rather the care, encouragement, and admonishment needed for the growth of the members and the intimate unity of the entire body."

Study Questions

1. How, according to Paul, are members in the body of Christ related to one another? Consider how this image points to both the diversity and the unity among members.
2. How does the Stoic concept of *oikeiosis* help us interpret Paul's view of membership in the body of Christ?
3. Why is it important (for the body's functioning) that we are members of the body of *Christ*? In other words, what is the practical significance of Jesus Christ being the head of the body which is the Church?
4. "How we tend to each other (or not) as members of the same body, the Body of Christ, is *personal to Jesus Christ*," Amy Everett writes. How does she trace this theme in Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to Peter by the Sea of Tiberias and to Saul/Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19)?
5. Christians agree that baptism is essential to becoming a member of the body of Christ. According to Jim Somerville, what is at stake between Christians who practice adult believer's baptism and those who practice infant baptism and adult confirmation? Why does he urge congregations not to practice "re-baptism" of believers?

Departing Hymn: "United by God's Grace"

† Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Keys to First Corinthians: Revisiting the Major Issues* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 206-207.



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Focus Article:

📖 Not Marching,
but Dancing
(*Membership*, pp. 19-26)

Suggested Article:

📖 Gathered to Listen
(*Membership*, pp. 38-39)

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Not Marching, but Dancing

An ornery professor who went to church from no apparent personal desire, C. S. Lewis has much to teach us about the nature of membership. He staunchly affirms that the Church has a place in the modern world because it alone can sustain the sort of membership in which human life is fulfilled.

Prayer

God, we confess that we do not know how to be members of a community; we do not know how to overcome evil with good, how to love our enemies, how to be children of God. Sometimes we do not want to be members of a community. Forgive us. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Romans 12:4-8

Meditation†

The Christian is called not to individualism but to membership in the mystical body [of Christ]. ... We are summoned from the outset to combine as creatures with our Creator, as mortals with immortal, as redeemed sinners with sinless Redeemer. His presence, the interaction between Him and us, must always be the overwhelmingly dominate factor in the life we are to lead within the Body, and any conception of Christian fellowship which does not mean primarily fellowship with Him is out of court.

C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

Reflection

C. S. Lewis was “an astute analyst of his world,” note Lindsey Brigham and Wayne Martindale. He saw that “all attempts at membership outside the Church overemphasize either the individual or the collective, making true membership impossible.”

He believed individualism “makes membership impossible because it leads to a self-sufficient, self-centered confidence that regards other people as largely irrelevant.” In this narrative, other people and even God become less valuable than the individual, existing only to serve his or her needs. Far from freeing individuals to accomplish their full potential, however, this stance actually impairs people by preventing them from acknowledging their inevitable limitation and accepting help.

Collectivism, on the other hand, “undermines membership by leading to a callous insensitivity to the unique needs and gifts people carry.” Lewis calls collectivism “an outrage upon human nature.” By valuing people only for characteristics which are useful to the system, it degrades or eliminates their unique traits which are not. Diverse people with different strengths and weaknesses are reduced to uniform cogs in a machine.

Individualism and collectivism are diametrically opposed stances, but Lewis warns “one error begets the other and, far from neutralizing, they aggravate each other.” We often witness their strange partnership in a consumerist culture. Consider how advertising works. “Ads are created with a collectivist attitude by considering a group of potential consumers, isolating their habits and tastes, and then appealing to these uniform, decontextualized tendencies,” Brigham and Martindale



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Heather Hughes, the author of this study guide, is Publication Specialist and Project Coordinator in The Institute for Faith and Learning at Baylor University. She serves as assistant editor of *Christian Reflection*.

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observe. “Yet consumers are often motivated to heed advertisements by their individualistic longing to define themselves by brand names, to design the perfect life setting, to construct a unique life story.”

The safe passage between these modern Scylla and Charybdis is true Pauline membership in the body of Christ, opposed to the fragmentation of both individualism and collectivism. Members of Christ’s body are not self-sufficient, but neither are they uniform parts in a collective. They are unique organs created with particular purposes that complement one another for the common good of the body. This sort of complementariness, which makes it possible for members to serve and govern one another peacefully, is only possible because the head of the body transcends their merely human interests.

It is the headship of the incarnate God-man Jesus Christ that sets the Church apart from other, insufficient forms of human membership: “Under the headship of Christ, the body’s members are reassembled, their health is restored, and Spirit-life is breathed into their dry bones,” Brigham and Martindale write. In Christ, true unity in diversity is founded and maintained.

They acknowledge that this ideal is not fully realized in the Church in this fallen world. Church membership can be more characterized by strife than “harmonious diversity and purposeful order.” Yet, despite the struggle involved, “to be a Christian is to be part of Christ’s body, and God has ordained that on this earth that body manifests itself in and through the Church.”

For C. S. Lewis, church membership was not optional. Luckily, “the obligatory nature of church membership means that, in some sense, those who faithfully participate in Church from duty may eventually receive more benefits from it than from any merely human sort of Christian fellowship,” Brigham and Martindale conclude. Indeed, “when we faithfully practice church membership in obedience to Jesus Christ, true transformation and joy will inevitably happen.”

Study Questions

1. While modern individualism and collectivism are opposites, C. S. Lewis believes that they “aggravate” rather than “neutralize” each other. What does he mean by this?
2. How can church membership form (what Lewis calls) “the almost fantastic variety of the saints,” rather than the “monotonously alike worldlings” churned out by collectives?
3. Why, according to Lewis, is church membership obligatory for Christians? How does this undermine contemporary notions of individualistic religion?
4. Identify the primary temptations toward individualism and collectivism in your congregation. How can you resist them?
5. How does Laura James, in her painting *Sermon on the Mount*, depict both the unity and the diversity that ideally characterize Christ’s body, the Church?

Departing Hymn: “United by God’s Grace”

† C. S. Lewis, “Membership” (1945), in *The Weight of Glory and Other Essays* (New York, MacMillan Publishing Company, 1976 [1949]), 110.



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Focus Article:

📖 "Membered and Remembered"
(*Membership*, pp. 27-34)

Suggested Article:

📖 "Mapping the Life Together"
(*Membership*, pp. 88-93)

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Membered and Remembered

In Wendell Berry's fiction about "the Port William membership," the Pauline theme of membership in Christ finds an analog in a quotidian fellowship of farmers. From stories of their membership we can draw important lessons in church membership.

Prayer

O Trinity, our God who is yourself Community, who created us in your image, teach us how to be united under the banner of your love. Teach us how to walk in faith to love and serve you, to love and serve one another. Remind us of your image in us, and draw us to one another. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2:19-22

Meditation[†]

A community is the mental and spiritual condition of knowing that the place is shared, and that the people who share the place define and limit the possibilities of each other's lives. It is the knowledge that people have of each other, their concern for each other, their trust in each other, the freedom with which they come and go among themselves.

Wendell Berry

Reflection

Some important dimensions of church membership are depicted narratively in Wendell Berry's stories about a fictional farming community, Port William, KY. Brent Laytham gleans these six insights about membership from Berry's stories.

- ▶ *Membership includes everything in God's kindly purposes.* As the character Burley puts it, "...we are members of each other. All of us. Everything. The difference ain't in who is a member and who is not, but in who knows it and who don't."

Does this view confuse membership with creatureliness? Berry is saying "we are woven into a belonging that precedes and grounds us, that produces and guides us, that beckons and blesses us," Latham responds. "Put theologically, membership in Christ presupposes our shared origin as members with all creatures of God's very good creation, which includes our shared destiny in the renewal of all things."

- ▶ *Membership is given before it is chosen.* To Elton, a proud farmer who resents accepting land he cannot afford, Wheeler Catlett explains, "The way you got in... was by being chosen. The way you stay in it is by choice. ...[We] can't exist at all except as gifts." While we realize we haven't earned our place in the Church, Latham notes, "the pervasive voluntarism and consumerism that distort our culture inexorably press us toward imagining and thus living as if we chose our membership (voluntarism) and that choice made it ours (consumerism)."
- ▶ *Membership requires a common good and a common place.* Berry's characters work *in* and *for* their community. When Paul says we are given gifts "for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7), he means to serve a particular group in a particular place. "Modern mobility has trained us to be relatively indifferent to where we are, to treat places more like interchangeable widgets or consumer goods than like



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treasures to be cherished,” Latham laments. “Our church membership must learn to work in, with, and for its place.”

- ▶ *Memberships subsists in shared labors and loves.* The character Hannah Coulter discovers “rhymed labors” – small tasks that cause her to remember past labors and co-laborers – are “a comfort ever and always, like hearing the rhyme come when you are singing a song.” Many acts of worship and works of mercy in Church are like this; they bind us together with other members, present and past.
- ▶ *Membership requires gifted rememberers.* Latham adds remembrance to the list of spiritual gifts. The rememberer’s mantle can be passed from one generation to another. “We need rememberers exercising the gift of remembrance to ‘quote [the dead] in their own voices at appropriate times...[and] to call the absent into presence.’ We need gifted rememberers to keep alive in their minds the minds of our saints.”
- ▶ *Membership extends beyond our knowing.* “The connection of the body of Christ through time is more than...our capacity to keep previous members ‘alive’ in our memories,” Latham writes. “What truly connects us...is Christ’s remembering – ‘the care of a longer love than any...have ever imagined.’”

We are called to *realize* this larger community through our active remembering. Several characters have visions of their fraying, quarrelsome Port William re-remembered in perfection. In one of these, Andy Catlett realizes “all apologies come too late” for the heartache, suffering, and sin in the community. Yet “it seemed...almost a proof of immortality that nothing mortal could contain all its sorrow. [And so]... he was thinking of heavenly pity, heavenly forgiveness, and his thought was a confession of need. It was a prayer.” Indeed, Latham says, “Berry’s final lesson for us is of a remembering love that includes us in its forgiveness, of ‘a light that includes our darkness,’ of a love that ‘overflows the allowance of the world,’ so that we will finally be ‘corrected and clarified.’”

Study Questions

1. Membership is both something that we *receive* and something we *do*. How are these two aspects related? How does membership fray when we neglect one of these dimensions?
2. Membership involves both serving a common good in a particular place, and having gifted rememberers who connect us with members in other times and places. How well does your congregation accomplish these aspects of membership?
3. Discuss the “rhymed labors” that bind together your congregation’s membership.
4. Consider Debra Dean Murphy’s observation in light of this discussion of membership and your experience: “In recent years a counterintuitive idea has gained traction: perhaps people desire more rigor, not less, in their experience of church life. Maybe ancient, corporate disciplines like *lectio divina* or praying the Psalms or confessing our sins to one another have a renewed appeal in this age of digital loneliness. It might be...that church members long for accountability and the demands (and joys) of discipleship.”

Departing Hymn: “One in Jesus”

† Wendell Berry, “The Loss of the Future,” in *The Long-Legged House* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2012 [1969]), 53-74, here citing 71.



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Focus Article:

📖 Mutual Correction
(*Membership*, pp. 57-64)

Suggested Article:

📖 Working in Christ's Body
(*Membership*, pp. 40-43)

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Mutual Correction

One of the most significant, difficult, and neglected obligations we owe to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ is mutual correction. This practice of giving and accepting counsel, admonishment, and rebuke is a form of spiritual rescue.

Prayer

O God, who came to comfort, anticipating the pain of life in this world, groan for us and with us.

Show us how we are most needed. Teach us to be comforters, to bear one another's burdens, and to pray without words when the words of this world are simply inadequate.

Amen.

Scripture Reading: Galatians 6:1-5

Meditation†

You cannot surrender to God a self you do not know. This was surely in the design of community that we might find ourselves in the mirror of that community. As we share the common life, one unredeemed area after another comes to light. The joy of involvement is interwoven with the pain of it.

Elizabeth O'Connor (1928-1998)

Reflection

"We all want encouragement from those around us, especially those who are close to us," Darin Davis notes. "If we are actually trying to 'put courage in' one another – or perhaps better understood, trying to open one another to God's redemptive grace – then we have to realize that encouragement includes mutual correction. ... For Christians called to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), mutual correction is a profound expression of charity: it is a way of loving others, who, like us, are prone to missteps along the path that God sets before us."

Mutual correction is difficult: on the giving end, we can botch our advice so that it alienates the one we are trying to help, and on the receiving end, it is rarely pleasant to have another person point out our failings. That is why friendship is required for mutual correction. We are more able to *give* good advice to someone whom we love and know well, and it is much easier to *accept* moral counsel and rebuke from a person who loves us.

Davis believes that friends need four virtues – charity (*agape* love), humility, prudence, and courage – in order for their mutual correction to be "truthful, restorative, and truly encouraging."

- ▶ *The motivation should be charity.* "We are called to help our friends in their time of spiritual peril because we love them, we love God, and we see their moral distress as something that thwarts their true happiness," Davis writes. Since "our friends love us, we must receive their correction with the same spirit it is offered." We must resist self-serving motives that creep into advice-giving, like gaining power over others, or shifting attention away from our own moral weaknesses.
- ▶ *Humility lets us recognize our own sin.* Davis notes that "Jesus's teaching about not judging others in Matthew 7:1-5 is not a prohibition of moral correction, but a call to moral self-awareness." Humility lets us stop worrying about how we compare with others



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and allows us to make an honest self-assessment. "When we recognize our place in the created order involves deep equality with other human beings, and we understand how our own striving for God is compromised by sin, then we are likely to have a richer appreciation of the fragility of our own moral character and clearer awareness of the nature of our friend's trouble."

- ▶ *With prudence we can judge what to say and do in individual cases.* What should we say? When and how should we say it? Or, is it better to keep silent? Wise discernment helps us to know. "Sound as my counsel may be, and though it is motivated by charity, it has little chance of the intended effect if I offer it in a way that will embarrass or humiliate my friend."
- ▶ *Courage enables us to find the voice to speak up.* Correction is difficult to give. Even when we are motivated by love and act in humility, we may be tempted to "remain silent, painfully aware that something needs to be said or done."

Davis believes that the sort of spiritual friendship that fosters our willingness to give and receive correction and the virtues we require to do this well "is a profound expression of real encouragement, for it opens us to God's love, which restores all of us, no matter how far we have strayed from his path."

Study Questions

1. How can you tell when correction is truly offered in charity, or *agape* love and humility?
2. How is courage required in giving and receiving correction?
3. Why, according to Davis, is friendship "the right home" for mutual correction? If someone you know needs correction, but is not a friend, how would you proceed?
4. Discuss how Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:15-17 guides our prudence, or wise discernment, in offering correction.
5. In Andrea da Firenze's fantastical fresco, *Allegory of the Active and Triumphant Church and of the Dominican Order*, how do Dominicans serve the body of Christ by offering correction? How can all Christians participate in this form of ministry?

Departing Hymn: "Let Us Bear Each Other's Burdens" (verse 1)

Let us bear each other's burdens
as we struggle on through life;
turn not on the erring members,
add not to their care and strife;
let our hearts beat kindly for them,
for this world with sin is rife.
If their burdens be so heavy
that they stoop beneath the care,
let us bear them, of our vigor,
help them as we well can spare.

J. Van Namee (1881), alt.
Tune: ALL THE WAY

† Elizabeth O'Connor, *Call to Commitment: The Story of the Church of the Saviour*, Washington, DC (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 93.



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Focus Articles:

- 📖 Are Emerging Adults
“Spiritual but
Not Religious?”
(*Membership*, pp. 65-72)

Suggested Article:

- 📖 How is the Body Ailing?
(*Membership*, pp. 82-87)

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Are Emerging Adults “Spiritual but Not Religious?”

The “spiritual but not religious” category has been an interesting group for congregations to study despite its not being a statistical majority. However, it is far more intriguing to consider the membership implications of four types of emerging adults.

Prayer

O Trinity, our God who is yourself Community and who created us in your image, teach us how to be united under the banner of your love.

Open our eyes and our hearts to see the needs of those sitting beside us in the pew, crossing the street in front of us, and sitting beside us in cubicles and classrooms.

Remind us of your image in us, and draw us to one another. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Luke 8:5-8; 11-15

Meditation¹

Like the Baby Jesus, I need a ‘holy family’ to belong to. I need to belong to something bigger than myself. If I don’t, then I run the risk of developing a sort of God-and-me spirituality with no support systems to hold me up when I am weak, no prophets to challenge me when I am wrong and no party-mates with whom I may celebrate the Lord’s goodness in my life.

Mark E. Thibodeaux, S.J.

Reflection

“The transition to adulthood today is more complex, disjointed, and confusing than in past decades,” Christian Smith and Patricia Snell Herzog have noted. “The steps through and to schooling, the first real job, marriage, and parenthood are simply less well organized and coherent today than they were in generations past.”² The period between adolescence and adulthood (roughly between 18 and 30 years old) is being stretched by the expansion of higher education, the delay of marriage, instability in the work economy, and parents willing to extend financial and other support to their children.

The spiritual and religious lives of emerging adults are often in flux, but not all in the same way. Herzog offers the following typology of their religiosity.

- ▶ *RAAS (religious and also spiritual)* emerging adults are the “committed traditionalists” who embrace, articulate, and regularly practice their faith. Less than 15% of emerging adults are in this category. Most of them were nurtured by parents or adult church members with strong faith.
- ▶ *RBNS (religious but not spiritual)* emerging adults still follow some tenets of their faith out of habit, but they have little personal spiritual connection to these practices. Not wanting to ‘rock the boat’ with their families over religion, “they continue to practice certain elements, especially those which tend to conflict the least with other mainstream American values, and discard the rest,” Herzog writes. About 30% of emerging adults are like this. Because they are “somewhat religiously active,” she suggests this group is “the one in need of most attention by faith communities.”



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- ▶ *SBNR (spiritual but not religious)* emerging adults are open to spiritual matters, but are not very committed to any religious group. About 15% of emerging adults are in this category. Some are hostile to organized religion, but others have just lost interest and think they do not need a community to nurture their faith. A third *SBNR* subgroup sees value in all religions, but does not give preference to any particular one.
- ▶ *NRNS (not religious, not spiritual)* becomes the largest group (about 40%) of emerging adults, when we combine those that Smith and Herzog call “religiously disconnected,” “religiously indifferent,” and “irreligious.” In the latter two groups are young people whose bad experiences with religious institutions have made them “fairly antithetical to considering religion as either interesting or good.” But those in the first group, the religiously disconnected, seem to have had “shockingly low exposure to people of faith in any context.” Herzog suggests, “for at least a handful of this already small group (approximately five percent of emerging adults), their religiosity may look quite different if anyone in their lives ever simply invited them to a religious activity.”

When emerging adults fail to participate in congregational life, it is a commonplace to write them off as “spiritual but not religious.” But Herzog offers another explanation. “Religiously-attending emerging adults do not on the whole find that their faith communities have something to offer them during this unique life stage,” she observes. They “find themselves to be in between the traditional programming offered for youth and that offered for more established adults through marriage, childrearing, and other later adulthood statuses.” She concludes, “Perhaps then faith communities should be less concerned about whether emerging adults are *SBNR* and instead whether emerging adults are *SUBR*: severely underserved by religion.”

Study Questions

1. Why, according to Patricia Snell Herzog, are congregations focused on the *SBNR* emerging adults to the exclusion of other types? Which type does she urge them to focus on?
2. What significant differences in religiosity exist among the four types of emerging adults? What common patterns do you notice?
3. How might emerging adults respond to the more robust view of church membership that Jeff Cary commends in “How Is the Body Ailing?”
4. How does your congregation welcome and encourage the discipleship of emerging adults? (Be sure to consider their four distinctive patterns of religiosity.) How does it integrate them with faithful adult church members?

Departing Hymn: “One in Jesus”

¹ Mark E. Thibodeaux, S.J., *Armchair Mystic: Easing into Contemplative Prayer* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2001), 117.

² Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.

Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

Whose Body? Which Membership?

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand the Pauline image of the Church as the body of Christ.
2. To consider what it means to be a member of one *body*, and a member of *Christ's* body.
3. To discuss the issue of rebaptism in relation to church membership.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Membership (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting.

Begin with an Observation

To appreciate our distance from early Christian thinking about membership, Michelle Lee-Barnewall invites us to “consider how we identify ourselves in casual conversation.” She explains, “When we go to a social gathering where we do not already know the other people, almost invariably the conversation turns to the question ‘So what do you *do*?’ In our culture, we identify ourselves by our jobs and achievements. However, in Scripture people identify themselves by their family lineage. For example, Rebekah introduces herself as ‘the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor’ (Genesis 24:24). Joshua, who leads the Israelites after Moses, is identified as the ‘son of Nun’ over twenty times. Among Jesus’ apostles, the two James are distinguished as one being the ‘son of Zebedee’ and the other the ‘son of Alphaeus’ (Matthew 10:2). Jesus himself is identified as ‘the son of David, the son of Abraham’ (Matthew 1:1) and even ‘the son of God’ (Mark 1:1).

“In ancient cultures people found their identity not in what they did, but in their family or other group relationships. What are the implications of this way of viewing ourselves? Among other things, it means that priorities are group-related. Loyalty to the group is more important than individual satisfaction, relational commitment more than autonomy, and corporate benefit more than individual gain.” (*Membership*, 12)

The early Christians embraced this group orientation when they described themselves as members of “the family of God” and “the body of Christ.” In this study, Lee-Barnewall challenges us to live into this understanding of membership today.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading the unison prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

Christians understand that their moral lives are deeply informed by their membership in the body of Christ. This perspective is out of sync with contemporary individualism. In this study guide we explore the scriptural roots of this view in the writings of Paul. “Among other things, [the Pauline view] means that priorities are group-related,” Michelle Lee-Barnewall explains. “Loyalty to the group is more important than individual satisfaction, relational commitment more than autonomy, and corporate benefit more than individual gain.”

Study Questions

1. Paul usually employs the image of “the body of Christ” to emphasize the *unity* of members of the Church, Michelle Lee-Barnewall notes. Thus, members belong to one another (Romans 12:5; Ephesians 4:25), are members of one body (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 20; Ephesians 4:4), and they care for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25).
He also uses the image to encourage members to appreciate the *diversity* of one another’s gifts (Romans 12:6-7; 1 Corinthians 12:27-31) and ethnicities (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 3:5-6; cf. Galatians 3:26-28).
2. Lee-Barnewall cites the definition of *oikeiosis* as “recognition and appreciation of something as belonging to one.” The Stoic notion is that we will care for those things and people that “belong” to us. Something like this relation holds among members of the body of Christ (Romans 12:5; Ephesians 4:25). Thus, Paul writes, “members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it” (1 Corinthians 12:25-26).
3. Lee-Barnewall emphasizes two points of practical significance in regard to our being members of the body of *Christ*. First, Christ directs and empowers the actions of the obedient body members, and this gives us “hope that we can learn to care for and help one another.” Second, Christ models the sort of love that we are called to have toward one another.
4. As Peter answers Jesus three times “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you,” Jesus commands him, “Then feed/tend my sheep” (John 21:15-17). Amy Everett notes, “Jesus teaches Peter that if he loves him, then Peter will take care of the brothers and sisters with whom he shares this fellowship.” As Saul is on his way to persecute Christians in Damascus, he hears a voice from heaven say, “I am Jesus, *whom you are persecuting*” (Acts 9:5). Everett says, “Saul was not just conspiring against a band of misguided Jews, but against Jesus the Christ, now exalted in heaven, and yet present with and within his disciples.” Both stories comport well with the Pauline teaching that we are mutually interdependent members of Christ’s body.
5. Believer’s baptism is usually “by *immersion* (mode) *after* a profession of faith (sequence),” Jim Somerville notes. Other modes of baptism are sprinkling or pouring water over the head, and the baptism of infants occurs before the member’s profession of faith. As his Baptist congregation debated ending the practice of re-baptizing believers who had not been immersed after their profession of faith, he writes, “I began to think about a “continuum” of grace in which we recognize that even before a child is born – and before she has done one thing right or wrong – God loves her and wants her for his own. At some point – maybe around the age of twelve or thirteen – that child may be able to apprehend God’s grace, and accept it for the gift that it is. But these two things are simply the two ends of a single continuum, and while some Christians focus on the *giving* of grace through infant baptism, others focus on the *receiving* of grace through believer’s baptism.”

Departing Hymn

“United by God’s Grace” can be found on pp. 46-47 of *Membership*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Not Marching, but Dancing

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 2 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To consider how modern individualism and collectivism are opposed to true membership.
2. To understand how true Pauline membership, founded on the headship of Jesus Christ, is the path to harmonious unity of diverse individuals.
3. To discuss the temptations toward individualism or collectivism in your congregation.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of Membership (Christian Reflection) and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting.

Begin with a Comment

In his reflection on the Pauline concept of membership, C. S. Lewis wrote, "Equality is for me in the same position as clothes. It is a result of the Fall and the remedy for it. Any attempt to retrace the steps by which we have arrived at egalitarianism and to reintroduce the old authorities on the political level is for me as foolish as it would be to take off our clothes..."

"[Yet,] equality is a quantitative term and therefore love often knows nothing of it. Authority exercised with humility and obedience accepted with delight are the very lines along which our spirits live. Even in the life of the affections, much more in the Body of Christ, we step outside that world which says 'I am as good as you.' It is like turning from a march to a dance. It is like taking off our clothes. We become, as Chesterton said, taller when we bow; we become lowlier when we instruct. It delights me that there should be moments in the services of my own Church when the priest stands and I kneel. ..."

"In this way then, the Christian life defends the single personality from the collective, not by isolating him but by giving him the status of an organ in the mystical Body."

C. S. Lewis, "Membership" (1945), in *The Weight of Glory and Other Essays* (New York, MacMillan Publishing Company, 1976 [1949]), 115-116.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading the unison prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Romans 12:4-8 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

This study focuses on the modern errors of individualism and collectivism that make it difficult for us to understand and live out Christian membership. Lindsey Brigham and Wayne Martindale highlight C. S. Lewis's account of these errors and expand on it with examples and insights of their own. As members of Christ's body, we do not proudly isolate ourselves in supposed self-sufficiency, nor are we redundant parts of a whole. Instead, we flourish together in a diversity that allows us to better serve and govern one another in obedience to Christ, our head.

Study Questions

1. C. S. Lewis sees individualism and collectivism as two sides of the same coin: each one overemphasizes an element of how people relate in community. If we treat individualism as the solution to collectivism, or vice versa, we will swing on a pendulum of error. To focus on which error is worse is to play into the devil's hands: "He always sends errors into the world in pairs – pairs of opposites," Lewis says. "He relies on your extra dislike of the one error to draw you gradually into the opposite one." Instead, we should "keep our eyes on the goal [of membership under the headship of Christ] and go straight through between both errors. We have no other concern than that with either of them."
2. Like organs in a human body, church members are united to one another not by their uniformity, but through their harmonious diversity of strengths and interdependent purposes. Submitting to Christ as the head of the body does not obliterate members' personalities; it restores health to each one in their particularity and facilitates their mutual service and governance. As members faithfully pursue their distinct missions, they grow freely into their diverse giftedness – what C. S. Lewis calls "the almost fantastic variety of the saints." Consider the diversity of saints in history (e.g., Francis of Assisi, Thomas Aquinas, and Mother Theresa) or in the holy people of your own congregation.

Those who reject membership in the body of Christ tend to fall prey to the mirror errors of individualism and collectivism. These 'worldly' patterns of association produce "monotonously alike worldlings" who are similar to one another in their worn out patterns of sin and dissatisfaction. Recall Lindsey Brigham and Wayne Martindale's discussion of consumerism: in trying to create self-determined identities, consumers ironically become easy to manipulate by collectivist advertisement strategies.

3. Brigham and Martindale summarize Lewis's view: "To be a Christian is to be part of Christ's body, and God has ordained that on this earth that body manifests itself in and through the Church." We cannot claim to follow Christ if we ignore where and how he has chosen to live and operate in this world. "The New Testament does not envisage solitary religion," C. S. Lewis wrote: "some kind of regular assembly for worship and instruction is everywhere taken for granted in the Epistles. So we must be regular practicing members of the Church."

Discuss what it means to be "regular practicing members of the Church" in your congregation. Do you have a system or program for church membership? If so, how does this reflect the membership congregants have in the mystical body of Christ?

4. Form two small groups to focus on the temptations toward individualism and collectivism. See if their conclusions dovetail in ways predicted by Lewis. The 'collectivism group' might notice the pressing similarities in lifestyle, dress, social practices, wealth, ethnicity, and so on that characterize the congregation. Are these the result of considered Christian reflection, or patterns of social conformity? The 'individualism group' might notice how members deal with problems (job loss, difficult relationships, disease) as individuals. Look for points of convergence: e.g., does *everyone* own a *specialty* Bible tailored to their chosen peer group?
5. The cruciform figure of Jesus unites the listening members in Laura James's *Sermon on the Mount*. There is a "subtlety of diverse elements within James's unified and harmonious composition," Heidi Hornik explains. "Though the disciples appear at first to be just a simplified, bright, balanced mass of color, on closer inspection they are individuals with varying facial characteristics, hairstyle, clothing type and color, and gesture or hand position. Despite the patterned repetition of these features, no two figures in the image are exactly the same."

Departing Hymn

"United by God's Grace" is on pp. 46-47 of *Membership*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Membered and Remembered

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To consider the lessons of church membership that Latham draws from Wendell Berry's stories about the fictional town of Port William, KY.
2. To relate the giftedness of membership to the activities we do to sustain it.
3. To discuss how your congregation can realize a richer level of membership.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Membership (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

In Wendell Berry's stories about Port William, KY, a few characters have visions that re-member the community, perfected and whole. The barber, grave digger, and church janitor Jayber Crow has this vision at the end of a day working in the cemetery and remembering the dead.

What I saw now was the community imperfect and irresolute but held together by the frayed and always fraying, incomplete and yet ever-holding bonds of the various sorts of affection. ... It was a community always disappointed in itself, disappointing its members, always trying to contain its divisions and gentle its meanness, always failing and yet always preserving a sort of will toward goodwill. I knew that, in the midst of all the ignorance and error, this was a membership; it was the membership of Port William and of no other place on earth. My vision gathered the community as it never has been and never will be gathered in this world of time.... I saw them all as somehow perfected, beyond time, by one another's love, compassion, and forgiveness as it is said we may be perfected by grace.

And so there we all were on a little wave of time lifting up to eternity, and none of us ever in time would know what to make of it. How could we? It is a mystery....

Wendell Berry, *Jayber Crow* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2000) 205

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading the unison prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Ephesians 2:19-22 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

In this study we continue to explore the Pauline view of church membership, but now through the helpful analogue of Wendell Berry's novels and stories about the "Port William membership." If group members are familiar with Berry's writings, encourage them to elaborate Brent Latham's six lessons with examples of their own. Everyone can appreciate the insightful lessons and use them to appreciate and enrich the membership in the congregation.

Study Questions

1. Assign two small groups to sift the lessons that Brent Laytham has gleaned from Wendell Berry's stories for these two dimensions of membership. When they report their findings, consider how important each dimension is for the membership.

Berry repeatedly stresses that membership is a gift. This is evident in several lessons: we are members, in some sense, before we know it; we were chosen by God, before we chose to embrace the membership; the membership thrives in shared labors; our re-membering the membership is the exercise of a gift; and the membership extends beyond our knowing.

On the other hand, we are called to actions that realize and deepen the membership: we discern the universal reach of membership; we embrace the membership given to us; we embrace and learn to care for the common good and particular place of our membership; we participate in the shared labors and encourage the gifted rememberers; and we strive to actively remember and embrace the larger community that extends beyond our knowing (in other congregations, Christian traditions, eras, and so on).

Ingratitude can close us off to the gift of membership; inactivity can diminish its realization in the present place and time. Yet the gift of membership precedes and ultimately redeems all of our doings.

2. There is some tension between these two aspects of membership, which stress the local and the more global aspects of the Church, respectively. Yet there are many connections; for instance, how a congregation is meeting a local need now might echo how previous generations dealt with that need. You might divide into two groups to treat the aspects separately, and then see what specific connections members find between the two. Discuss specific ways that the congregation might strengthen each aspect of membership.
3. Latham gives several examples: "Perhaps in kneeling at an old altar rail, or singing an old and favorite hymn, or praying an ancient prayer, we may experience the rhyme that Hannah Coulter names: us doing now in the same place what those with whom we are membered together in love did here before us and taught us to do. Perhaps the most obvious 'rhymes' of our Christian labor and love are the practices of baptism and communion." Encourage members to think of labors that "rhyme" with Christians in other eras and cultures, of labors that "rhyme" mainly with your own congregation's past members, and labors that "rhyme" with personal and family experiences that members have had through the years.
4. Have members experienced the phenomenon that Debra Dean Murphy is describing? The resources that she reviews will point them to it. Notice that the desire for "more rigor, not less, in their experience of church life" has two aspects: a longing to be connected to other Christians through "ancient, corporate disciplines" and a longing for "accountability" to other members, past and present. These believers are shifting away from individualism toward community that transcends their individual's choice and design. They seem to hunger for the "rhymed labors" that the character Hannah Coulter discovered. They feel the need for the gifted rememberers who can faithfully point them to the larger membership they would welcome.

Departing Hymn

"One in Jesus" is on pp. 44-45 of *Membership*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Mutual Correction

Lesson Plans

Abridged Plan	Standard Plan
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To explore how mutual correction can become part of the encouragement we give one another in the contexts of friendship, family, and congregational life.
2. To discuss why friendship is required for mutual correction.
3. To understand why the virtues of charity, humility, prudence, and courage are required for mutual correction that is truly encouraging and restorative.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Membership (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Let Us Bear Each Other’s Burdens” locate the familiar tune ALL THE WAY in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

Darin Davis recalls, “A student of mine came to see me recently to talk about friendship. He began by asking questions about the writings of Aristotle and Aquinas that we were reading in class, but soon he was asking questions about friendship in his own life.

“He described a close friend who is abusing alcohol. The friend’s academic work was beginning to suffer, and his relationships with family and friends were beginning to fray. My student was greatly concerned about his friend’s drinking. ‘I am worried something terrible may happen,’ he told me. ‘I know I need to do something, but I am worried that if I say or do the wrong thing, my friend will turn against me, and then what?’

“And then my student said, ‘People always talk about friends encouraging one another, but we don’t talk much about correcting each other’s ways. It seems like Christians hardly ever talk about that.’” (*Membership*, 57)

In this study Davis explores the role of mutual correction in encouraging our friends and outlines the virtues that we need in order to offer and receive correction faithfully and well.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading the unison prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Galatians 6:1-5 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

As members of the body of Christ, we are called to “bear one another’s burdens,” and this includes reproving, restoring, and encouraging one another when we stray from the way of Christ. In this study, we consider the

sort of people we must be in order to give and receive this sort of correction faithfully. The correction, forgiveness, and restoration of church leaders when they fail can be especially difficult. For more resources on this topic, see Robert B. Kruschwitz, "Failing Leaders," in the *Forgiveness* issue of *Christian Reflection*, pp. 71-77. This is available online at www.ChristianEthics.ws.

Study Questions

1. When correction arises from charity and is offered in humility, it is done for the right reason, at the right time, and in the right way. Only then can its outcome be "truthful, restorative, and truly encouraging," Darin Davis notes. The right reason is "to help our friends in their time of spiritual peril because we love them, we love God, and we see their moral distress as something that thwarts their true happiness," he writes. "This has nothing to do with being in some kind of morally superior and justifiable position to offer correction to someone else."
2. In receiving correction, we may be afraid of knowing the extent of our own moral disorder, losing our reputation for goodness, having our disorder revealed by a person we envy, losing the love of the person who corrects us, and so on. In giving correction, we may be afraid of losing the friendship of the person we are correcting, discouraging the person and turning her against goodness itself, and so on. Davis explains, "Without courage, the charity that rightly motivates our care and concern for a wayward friend may remain hidden, unexpressed. With courage, we can find the voice to speak up, even when it is difficult."
3. Davis situates mutual correction in the context of friendship for two reasons. First, "it is doubtful that we will receive well and embrace moral counsel or rebuke from persons we only casually know. Our first and legitimate reaction would likely be: what business is this of yours? Even when it is well-intended, such blind moral correction easily can make matters much worse." Second, the "deep knowledge of one another's character, history, hopes, desires, fears, and struggles" required by mutual correction is only possible among friends. "Without truly knowing one another, we have no idea how even to approach one another, let alone how to receive counsel or rebuke."
Both reasons suggest that we should be very careful in correcting a stranger. Perhaps it would be wiser for us to encourage someone who knows the person and situation better to correct the person, or for us to instruct the person indirectly in another way (e.g., through teaching or preaching). Davis believes, "We are called first to offer correction to those closest to us, for it is our duty to attend to their good in a special way. Only as the opportunity arises (and surely such cases will be rare indeed) should we be concerned with correcting those distantly related to us."
4. Summarizing Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:15-17, Davis writes: "Because sin threatens both a person's conscience and his reputation, the first step of moral correction is to appeal to a friend's conscience. Accordingly, we should attempt to correct our friend in private before we involve others. If our friend does not respond to this confidential effort, it is advisable to involve a few others – preferably, other mutual friends – to help call his attention to the sin. Last, and only when all else has failed, such correction should be made in public."
5. Heidi Hornik writes, "The Dominicans are present in both the heavenly and earthly realms of this fantastical fresco." They offer guidance three ways – through preaching, teaching, and hearing confession. Their preaching is depicted as "a fierce fight between a pack of wolves that are trying to snatch sheep and the black and white dogs that are protecting them." The wolves are heretics, the sheep are congregants, and the dogs are ministers who bark sound, sacred doctrine. Their teaching role is instanced by a leading Dominican university teacher and writer, Thomas Aquinas, who is poised holding a book beside the dogs chasing away the wolves. Finally, their role in hearing confession and offering individualized counsel to penitents is shown by a "figure kneeling before a Dominican [who] receives absolution just to the right of Dominic directing the faithful...from earth to heaven." Consider how all members of the body of Christ may take on these roles of preaching to, teaching, and correcting one another.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Are Emerging Adults “Spiritual but Not Religious?”

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 2 and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To distinguish four broad patterns of religiosity among emerging adults.
2. To consider how emerging adults might respond to a robust view of church membership.
3. To discuss how your congregation can encourage the discipleship of emerging adults.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Membership (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting.

Begin with an Observation

“One of the more tragic elements of American religiosity,” Patricia Snell Herzog writes, “is the extent to which most religious congregations do not offer anything – services, programs, or activities of any kind – that appeal to and are specifically designed to target emerging adults. It is rare that religious congregations even acknowledge the life stage of emerging adulthood and how it differs from the needs of adolescence and adulthood, let alone offer something specifically for this life stage. The trouble then is that there are many emerging adults already in faith communities all over the country who still think they should keep coming, at least sometimes, and yet find very little designed for and connecting them when they do come.” (*Membership*, 72)

Given this neglect by congregations, she thinks it is not surprising that some emerging adults lose spiritual meaning in their church attendance, or drop out altogether. She explores how to encourage the discipleship of these young people who have emerged from adolescence but have not yet entered the institutions and responsibilities of adulthood.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading the unison prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 8:5-8; 11-15 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

Discussions of church membership inevitably turn to how congregations are ministering to and using the gifts of this or that group of people. One of the most talked about groups is emerging adults, who are widely believed to be spiritual in some sense, but not committed to practicing their faith through religious institutions. Patricia Snell Herzog complicates this popular image of emerging adulthood in helpful ways

Herzog has collaborated with lead researcher Christian Smith and others to write the book(s) on the religiosity of emerging adults: *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford University Press, 2009) and *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (Oxford University Press, 2011). For more information on their work, see the National Study of Youth and Religion project at www.youthandreligion.org.

Study Questions

1. Patricia Snell Herzog thinks SBNR emerging adults receive attention for two reasons: “One is that they offer a warning to those in faith communities who think most emerging adults are religious (i.e. RAAS or RBNS), and two is that they offer some hope to those in faith communities who think most emerging adults are non-religious (i.e. NRNS).” For the latter reason, some congregations see emerging adults as spiritual seekers who are ripe for conversion and membership. “Some studies claim that this group is on the rise,” she notes, but “as of yet it does not appear to be a rapidly growing category or a statistical majority.”

Herzog urges congregations to focus on retaining RAAS (religious and also spiritual) and deepening the commitment of RBNS (religious but not spiritual) emerging adults. “Most of what appears to sustain membership in these...categories is their social connections to family or to people in faith communities. Thus, continuing their membership over time is especially contingent on not just getting them within religious walls but having something of substance offered once they are there to connect them to others within the congregation. This cannot simply be traditional forms of involvement designed in an era when people moved directly from adolescence to full adulthood. Marriage counseling, parenting classes, or any of the adult forms of programming that congregations typically offer do not appeal to most emerging adults, since many have not yet reached those stages. Furthermore, many do not find religious homes on college campus, and most emerging adults are past college for many years before settling down into later adulthood.”

2. You might divide members into four small groups and ask each group to start from ‘within’ one type in order to look for differences and similarities in the other types. Members might notice differences among the types (and subtypes) in degree of familiarity with and participation in religious practices, attitude toward religious institutions, beliefs about God (or a higher power), and religious experiences. There are similarities across the types as well: emerging adults’ degree of familiarity with and participation in religious practices are often correlated with their connectedness to their parents or other adults’ participation. Their previous experience with religious institutions (positive, negative, or none) plays a major role.
3. Invite members to share their experiences as (or with) emerging adults. Some emerging adults will shy from the responsibilities of church membership; they want to remain untethered during their education, job search, and dating years. But others (RAAS and RBNS) may long for spiritual engagement that is appropriate to their stage in life. Perhaps some emerging adults who are hostile to organized religion (among the SBNR and NRNS) are rejecting the diseased forms of Christianity – consumerist, parochial nationalist, or triumphalist – that Jeff Cary decries, and they will respond positively to the robust view of membership he commends. Perhaps the “religiously disconnected” among the NRNS type will find robust church membership to be winsomely different from the wider culture.
4. Again, you might divide members into four small groups to evaluate your congregational life from the perspective of each type of emerging adult. Do you have worship opportunities, classes, and programs appropriate to the spiritual challenges of emerging adulthood? If so, do these segregate emerging adults, or integrate them with adult church members? Consider how emerging adults enter your congregation – e.g., as children of your adult members, as students residing in your community for a few years, as first-job seekers, as tourists enjoying the natural environment or social life of your community. Are they likely to stay and become adult members of your congregation, or are you preparing them for discipleship in another locale?

Departing Hymn

“One in Jesus” is on pp. 44-45 of *Membership*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.