

### **Session Two Overview**

In 1933 a Nazi-aligned movement calling themselves the “German Christians” began to gain power among the German protestant churches and eventually organized a new state-run collaboration of churches called the “German Evangelical Church” under Nazi rule. Pastors and church leaders opposed to state authority and ideological interference in church affairs eventually formed a separate protestant organization of churches known as the “Confessing Church.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer was one such pastor and teacher. In 1935 he was asked to lead an underground seminary for the Confessing Church. He did so until 1937 when the Gestapo shut it down. Bonhoeffer's experience of the underground seminary inspired the writing of *Life Together* as a treatise and guide on Christian community. It focuses on the centrality of Christ’s work as the sole basis of Christian community, Christian community as a divinely gifted reality, and guidance and description of nurturing and maintaining such a community of love centered in Christ.

### **Key Scriptures/Passages**

*“How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity” - Psalm 133*

#### *Life Together Excerpts:*

“Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ.”

“Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.”

“Even when sin and misunderstanding burden the communal life, is not the sinning brother still a brother, with whom I, too, stand under the Word of Christ? Will not his sin be a constant occasion for me to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ? Thus the very hour of disillusionment with my brother becomes incomparably salutary, because it so thoroughly teaches me that neither of us can ever live by our own words and deeds, but only by that one Word and Deed which really binds us together the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ.”

## Questions

- How does leaning and/or recognizing a bit more about the social, cultural, and political context in which Bonhoeffer wrote *Life Together* affect the way it is received? In what ways may Bonhoeffer's assertions counter contemporary socio-political waves of his time? Are they still relevant in the same way?
- Bonhoeffer stresses the work and centrality of Christ alone as the basis of all Christian community. Why do you think he stresses this? What happens when Christian community is centered on something other than Christ?
- Bonhoeffer writes, "By sheer grace, God will not permit us to live even for a brief period in a dream world. He does not abandon us to those rapturous experiences and lofty moods that come over us like a dream. God is not a God of the emotions but the God of truth. Only that fellowship which faces such disillusionment, with all its unhappy and ugly aspects, begins to be what it should be in God's sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it."

What do you hear in this? Bonhoeffer seems to be wary of "rapturous experiences" and "lofty moods". What may be the dangers or pitfalls of such things? He stresses that Christian community is not an "ideal" reality, rather a "divine" reality? What do you suppose he means?

- "So between the death of Christ and the Last Day it is only by a gracious anticipation of the last things that Christians are privileged to live in visible fellowship with other Christians. It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in this world to share God's Word and sacrament. Not all Christians receive this blessing."

In this, Bonhoeffer exhorts Christians to be thankful and express gratitude for the instances Christians are able to gather. When have you been grateful for the Christian community? Have you ever been in a circumstance when you were unable to gather with other Christians? :) What was it like? What did you miss?

- Bonhoeffer advocates specific faith practices for nurturing, sustaining, and strengthening Christian community such as praying the Psalms, reading scripture, singing together, praying together, and receiving Holy Communion, as well as a balance between solitude/silence and community/speech. How do you see these practices? Which are parts of your own faith life? Which may you be compelled to engage in more or less? How do they continue to sustain the community?