Introduction

As a young girl growing up in Baltimore, Maryland, I would often take trips to the ocean with my family. I loved walking down the sandy shore with my siblings, picking up seashells and rocks, and tossing them back into the water. I watched the waves crest and fall, bringing in new shells and carrying others away. Between our forays into the ocean with our father, my mother, who was never too excited about the cold water, would crouch in the sand for hours, crafting a magnificent and intricate sand castle. My brothers, sister, and I would watch. At times, we would even try to help, getting into the sand with our hands and shovels and buckets. In our enthusiasm, when we would accidentally step in a tunnel and collapse it, we would try to rebuild it together.

One summer when my daughter was young, I tried to build a sand castle, and it was a complete failure. I built it too far from the water's edge, and the sand dried too quickly from the heat of the rising sun. I elicited my husband's help to bring buckets of water from the ocean, but as we raced to keep the walls up with water, other parts of the tunnel and walls would collapse. The castle became a perfect playground for my daughter's feet.

After my dreadful attempt to build a sand castle, I e-mailed my mother for advice and tips for the task. The trick to an excellent sand structure, she reminded me, is to build it close enough to the water so that, digging deep, one finds the moist sand that is the key to holding the structure together. At the same time, the structure needs to be far enough away from the water that the sand is not overly moist and that there is little chance a large wave will wash away the structure as it is still being created.

My mother would situate herself near the high-water line and douse the spot with water. Then she would begin the slow process of building a huge pile of tightly packed wet sand for the foundation. One does not begin to construct a sand castle in the hole, as I was trying to do; the building process occurs by sculpting the structure down from a larger pile of moist sand. Using her hands, the edge of a shovel, or a plastic knife from our lunch cooler, my mother would form, mold, shape, and carve the sand pile into a tower or series of walls. She would smile at our ill-fated attempts to create a tower out of dry sand in our buckets, and she would come to our aid by repacking our buckets with a mixture of wet and dry sand. She would move around the pile, reshaping, repacking, and recarving the creations of her young apprentices. I imagine now

that our immature contributions often disrupted my mother's vision for the castle of the day.

Our family's creation usually piqued the interest of families gathered around us, too. More often than not, complete strangers would pick up a shovel and begin to help. Just as the sea was in constant motion a few feet from our toes, so too my mother's creative vision ebbed and flowed with her children's attempts and failures and the intrusions of those around us. At the end of the morning, we would step back and marvel at our creation.

Still, we knew that as the day wore on, nothing would protect our family's creation. Inevitably with the tide change, we would have to shift our towels and blankets away from the rising water and watch our castle fall to the enfolding waves. Sand is a temporary medium. No matter how much work it took or whether we liked it or not, the sea would take back the shore. Building sand castles is a pretty foolish task. When one sand castle enthusiast was asked why she spends so much time building something that is just going to be washed away by the tide, she said, "Sandcastles are very much like life; the joy comes from the process of living and building and not in the act of completion."[1] As we left the beach after our visits, all we took away was the memory of our shared task—building our structure of sand—and the joy that comes from the process of living and building, not in the act of completion.

The process of building a sand castle only to watch it fall again is an apt metaphor for a church of the cross (the *ecclesia crucis*). The *ecclesia crucis* is sustained by the Holy Spirit, resisting desires for established permanence and insisting that, for the church to be church, it must include newcomers in the practices of discipleship. The *ecclesia crucis* does not need to dread the falling sand castle because joy comes from the fluidity and movement of newcomers and established members being and becoming disciples of Jesus Christ alongside one another. Mainline Protestant congregations in North America often desire permanence with an established membership as the solid foundation. With this premise, newcomers are not necessary. The *ecclesia crucis* beckons irresistibly to be sculpted and carved, reshaped and repacked by young and old, newcomer and established member together.

Welcoming Newcomers

In the following chapters, I will examine how congregations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America welcome newcomers. I prefer the word *newcomer* to *unchurched, unbaptized, visitor*, or *potential new member* because it does not

qualify the person's presence with anything other than the amount of time spent in relation to the congregation. I will use *newcomer* broadly to refer to any of three categories of persons who are initiating a process of exploring and joining a congregation: unbaptized adults, active Christians moving to a new congregation, and previously inactive baptized Christians. I will not explore welcoming newcomers from the perspectives of evangelism, mission, or hospitality—all of which are the subjects of significant bodies of literature in their own right. Rather, I am examining this ministry of welcoming newcomers as an educator who recognizes that newcomers must learn how to live as disciples.[2] Discipleship is learned through participation in congregational practices such as Bible study, prayer, worship, care for one another, service toward neighbor, and many others. Newcomers gain knowledge and skill only as they participate in congregational practices over time, together with established members. Established members are Christians counted on membership rolls, and they include active (worshipping) participants, less regular (worshipping) participants, and inactive members who do not participate.

To welcome newcomers, I propose a catechesis of the cross, or a *cruciform catechesis*, a type of learning that arises from newcomers and established members participating together in Christian discipleship practices. *Catechesis* is an old word for learning and means to "sound or echo in the ear."[3] I appreciate this old word because it reminds us that Christian discipleship practices have a relationship with the past. The stories about these practices arise out of Jesus' own practice, the witness of the first followers of Jesus, and the church's commitment to figuring out what faithfulness looks like in every era. To learn to be a disciple is to learn these practices and their stories.

Discipleship is not innate; we are not born disciples of Jesus Christ. Discipleship is experienced and learned; we become disciples of Jesus Christ. Thus, attention to learning or catechesis is necessary within the church. Discipleship and faith are interrelated, mutually informing one another. Discipleship and faith are also distinct. Discipleship is learning through participation in Christian practices, gaining knowledge and skill to sustain a Christian identity. To be clear, faith is not learned. Faith cannot be reduced to knowledge or skill. Faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Faith sustains and enables the life of disciples within and beyond the *ecclesia crucis*. In this book, I will reference discipleship more often than faith because I am attending specifically to those practices of Christianity that must be learned because they are not innate. Yet I will be careful not to draw the distinction too far, because discipleship and faith*fulness* (the response of faith) are synonyms.

I have added *cruciform* as a modifier of *catechesis* to situate participation in Christian discipleship practices at the foot of the cross. In catechesis at the foot of the cross, certainty loosens its grip, knowing breaks down, and truth and reality are turned upside down. On the cross, where God is fully absent, God is simultaneously fully present. In the crucified God, God is fully alive. Only faith, as a gift of the Spirit, can hold this paradox. Only *as* disciples can we learn what it means to *be* disciples of the cross. Another way to say this is that, at the foot of the cross, everything appears under its opposite, even the church. For the Christian church to be church, newcomers, who may or may not know what it means to be a disciple or who may or may not have received the gift of faith, must be present.

Newcomers call the church to its task of "making disciples." Making disciples is the life-sustaining, life-saving work that makes up the church's identity. The church does not seek permanence with established membership as the solid foundation, but fluidity and movement of newcomers and established members together. Thus, the life of the church depends upon a newcomer's presence within the body of Christ. Newcomers may be an unsettling presence, but they are saving the church.

A Cruciform Catechesis

A cruciform catechesis is an ecclesiological discipleship-making process that engages the conditions and reality of the world today, insisting that newcomers are indispensable participants of the *ecclesia crucis*. A newcomer's presence within a congregation reminds the congregation that there are people who do not yet belong. This reminder is most unsettling because the majority of established members experience their congregation as a promising context where they are nurtured in faith, hope, and love. Established members assume that newcomers experience this promise as naturally as they do.

When the Holy Spirit gathers people together, promises are declared. Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered, I am there among them."[4] Established members know this promise. In the hearing of scripture and proclamation of the gospel, faith awakens. Every baptism rehearses the covenantal declaration, "You have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, and marked with the cross of Christ forever."[5] Hope is extended at every fellowship meal in which a sense of blessedness hovers lightly and invisibly around the room. From confession to fellowship, Bible study to finance committee, Sunday school to soup kitchen, the confirmation of God's promise grounds all of ministry—implicitly and

explicitly—in love. God's determination to claim this world in the cross is heard again and again in God's covenant with the people of Israel, "I will be your God, and you will be *my* people."[6] The established members of a Christian congregation hear the promise of divine kinship alongside the people of Israel, "You are my people," and claim their identity too as a people belonging to God.

When a newcomer enters the congregation, the promising context becomes unsettled. Just who are "*my* people"? The presence of the newcomer reveals a question underlying the promise, and this question unsettles the established members already convinced of who and whose they are. Newcomers sit in the pew perhaps, but they are not yet committed to be "*my* people," and more, the congregation is not yet committed to welcoming them as "my people." The newcomer's question, "Who are *my* people?" reverberates within the life of the people under the cross, creating an unsettling tension between question and promise—a setting for a cruciform catechesis.[7]

A cruciform catechesis holds on to both the newcomer's questioning presence and the congregation's promising context. Some congregations will think they are welcoming yet fail to entertain or engage the newcomer's questioning presence. The difference is in the kind of questioning presence that is entertained. Does the congregation ask, "Who is this person?" without addressing the newcomer directly? It is natural for congregations to seek to reduce the tension between promise and question, for it is much easier to be a people hearing the promise and relishing God's promises "for us." Thus, there is a rush on the part of established church members and leaders to bring newcomers quickly into membership with a three-week class designed to tell them what they need to know. This rush satisfies the desire to get back to a comfortable equilibrium of the membership organization, where the promise of the gospel is proclaimed in comfort and familiarity. The side effect is that the promise extended to the newcomer is reduced to a general proclamation, "Everyone is welcome here; it doesn't matter who you are." Established members never have to ask the newcomer directly, "Who are you?" Tension disappears when newcomers and their questions are ignored.

This tension between promise and question exists only when newcomer questions are engaged within the church. Tension is created when the congregation asks the newcomer, "Who are you?" and then listens deeply to the response. I invite congregations to welcome newcomers and their unsettling questions as a means of grace. As gifts of the Holy Spirit, the means of grace create and sustain faith through an encounter with the living Word of God, Jesus Christ. The means of grace are the places where Jesus promises to show up—through the word of God, through the sacraments, and in the Christian community. Through

the Spirit's power, the church is called to steward these means. Established members come to trust these means and even, perhaps, take them for granted. If, however, the *ecclesia crucis* sees and encounters God where we least likely expect God to show up, then newcomers and their questions are a means of cruciform grace. Newcomers are angels unawares.[8] Jesus taught the disciples to expect and provide hospitality for unexpected guests. Newcomers are the people we least expect to bear the image of Jesus. The *ecclesia crucis* anticipates and prepares for those who come questioning the promise, expecting them to be promise bearers.[9] To face the questioned promise and remain in the tension, rather than seek to resolve it quickly, is the posture of welcome that makes space for newcomers and established members together to interrogate the question "Who are *my* people?"

And more, a cruciform catechesis is the learning that breaks open the possibility for established members to engage the question implicit within themselves. Since God's promises sometimes appear elusive, it is also easy for established members in congregations to spend their Sunday morning trying to pin down the promises for themselves. Protecting these promises would be as successful as my family's desire to protect our sand castle from the encroaching waves. Rather than protecting God's promises for ourselves or protecting "our" church castles from the waves of newcomer questions, I invite congregations to encourage newcomers in asking the questions that established members also ask. When established members engage the questions alongside newcomers, all are encouraged to articulate the promise of divine kinship and figure out together what faithfulness and belonging look like. Newcomer questions are the waves that bear the moisture and new sand, allowing for the ongoing re-creation of the church.

The setting for a cruciform catechesis is anywhere newcomers and established members participate together in Christian discipleship practices. A Bible study, prayer group, a service opportunity, and worship are all possible settings. The aim of a cruciform catechesis is a church marked by the Pauline virtues of faith, hope, and love.[10]

For Douglas John Hall, the Christian church as a people under the cross confesses faith, not sight; hope, not optimism; and love, not power.[11] This promise-filled confession of faith, hope, and love is never reconciled in a satisfying way but is filled with the tension of real life-saturated questions. Sight, optimism, and power are marks of a Christian church reducing tension and seeking triumphalism, a description of reality that is comprehensive, nonparadoxical, and entirely transcendent. Triumphalistic attitudes equate divinity with dominance, power, and victory.

Biblical faith confesses a different God. This God is, as Martin Luther would write, *Deus absconditus–Deus revelatus*, God whose self-revelation is also hidden: "For the work of God must be hidden and never understood, even when it happens. But it is never hidden in any other way than under that which appears contrary to our conceptions and ideas."[12] The church of the cross speaks of a God who is revealed in the place that reason and experience would be least likely to look: in human form in the manger and on the cross. This is a God who is compassionate—one who is "suffering-with," an incarnate God, a God in time, a God turned toward the world in love in Jesus Christ. Thus, the marks of the church of the cross are faith, hope, and love.[13]

Faith, Hope, and Love

Faith, for Hall, is not sight or certitude but is rather "being conscious of its own incompleteness." [14] Faith is thus a category of relationship happening or occurring between the Triune God and humanity.[15] Recognizing faith as neither assent nor certitude, Hall dismisses any notion that faith happens abstractly or objectively. Faith is a gift, an experience of God's promising presence as divine within the reality of the human condition. This experience of God as divine and human cultivates trust among humans, not through compulsion, but through a relationship in which Jesus Christ in the fullness of humanity seeks joy *and* sorrow, gladness *and* grief. Faith as a category of relationship and trust is not complete without an "other"; we cannot have faith without others.

Relationships are not static but fluid and dynamic, involving deep faith and honest doubt: "One could say, God expects us to doubt; because without doubt our belief in God becomes just as routine and artificial as happens in human relationships that have lost their vitality. So don't let anyone tell you, that if you have any doubt in you, you don't believe in God, or that Christian faith has no room for unfaith. The most poignant—and accurate—prayer of the Christian is always rather like the statement of a man to Jesus in the newer Testament: 'Lord, I believe, help my unbelief' (Mark 9:24)."[16] Faithful living is also doubt-filled living, and thus it is always seeking understanding through an experience of meaning in relationship with God or with humanity.

Congregations practice faith as they confess their incompleteness without the newcomer in their midst. Eagerly anticipating the questions that will arise out of the newcomer's experiences of the human condition and the holy, congregations are called to be in relationship with an "other." Faithful, doubt-filled living is the ability to ask questions, "neither threatened by nor scornful

of faiths of others; on the contrary, unlike the religiously sure-of-themselves, it is ready to listen to all seekers after God and Truth."[17] Faithful, doubt-filled living within congregations welcomes newcomer questions because the tension between promise and question is lived and not reduced.

Hall intimates that to hope is to repent of our triumphalistic ideologies of what the future will be and instead to live within the present. Hope is not pious optimism that produces a benign "peace of mind."[18] Being honest about the entropic force of death and the despair and suffering present in our lives and in the world, congregations live in the hope of the resurrection by looking toward the future with full regard for the world in which they are situated. "Hope that is fashioned 'beneath the cross of Jesus' will even, despite itself, be driven to greater and greater honesty about the data of despair, the realities that make for hopelessness."[19] However, to take a deep look at the suffering in the world is possible only with the courage given by God's grace. Courage comes from the promises contained within the means of grace (word, sacrament, and the Christian community). To confess hope for the future is to let the reality of the present and the past speak for itself,[20] and from the reality of the present and past imagine the future.

Congregations practice hope by daily dying and rising with the continuity and displacement, reproduction and transformation that inherently take place in incarnate, human organizations. In the honest confession of entropy, hope becomes tangible in those newcomers who will come and "be-come" members of the congregation. In questioning the promise, newcomers are the presence of the world within the congregation. Simultaneously, newcomers are the future of the congregation and thus announce with their presence the promise of new life given to the church. The congregational imagination of who the church might become is shaped through its encounters with newcomers in the present: "The bearing or stance appropriate to the church is not that of a community that has arrived but of one that is under way (*communio viatorum*)—that is, a community of hope."[21]

What is love? In the same way that faith is not sight but doubt and hope is not optimism but honesty about despair and hopelessness, love is not power or being powerful, but weakness and being weak. A confession of hope honest about suffering and pain engenders empathy and identification with the suffering that courageously calls upon *sola fides* (faith alone) to bear witness to the one who promises to be in relationship with us yet appears in places and people where we least expect to see the Holy Triune presence. Love is doubt-filled, courageous living not for one's self but for the sake of one's neighbor. God, who we expect to be powerful and mighty, shows us love in a manger

and on a cross. This love is a suffering love identified by the poor, the sick, and the dying.

Congregations practice love through an orientation to the cross upon which God's *agape* (suffering love) is revealed. Here at the foot of the incarnate presence of the Crucified, whose spirit cried out in abandonment, the human spirit also cries, "Why?" Love becomes tangible as newcomers appear at the threshold of congregations weary, broken, and worn, searching for meaning, purpose, identity, and new life. Love is the compulsion to welcome these strangers, eager to hear their questions and announcing God's promises for them and not only for ourselves. This love transforms the congregation's orientation toward God and to the world. Hall defines the outcome of faith as the grace-given courage to engage the world.[22] The marks come full circle. Love compels this faith. "Faith in the crucified one means courage to love the world and seek one's place in it despite the world's indifference and one's own yearning for security and calm. Faith is a journey toward the world."[23]

Ecclesia Crucis: A Courageous People under the Cross

To be a Christian church is to practice being a people under the cross. Like building sand castles, this task seems on its face pretty foolish. To be a Christian church is for the people under the cross to practice a confession of faith, hope, and love, welcoming newcomers into discipleship practices where faith meets doubt, hope meets despair, and love meets the suffering world. Hall calls the church of the cross an *ecclesia crucis*, which forms members for life in *and* beyond the local congregation:[24] "The whole purpose of this theology of the cross is to engender a movement—a people—that exists in the world under the sign of the cross of Jesus Christ: a movement and people called into being by his Spirit and being conformed to his person and furthering his work."[25] This movement, this people, is a church of the cross that embodies "the way of Jesus Christ" in its baptismal living, dying, and rising. This movement does not come from the courage of individuals, or even the courage of people, but rather from the movement of God toward the world in Jesus Christ: "The movement of the divine toward the world becomes now the necessity (the 'must') under which all of us live who through the divine Spirit have found in the crucified and risen one new life and a new beginning."[26] God's movement into the world compels the movement of all Christians into the world as disciples. The *ecclesia crucis* exists not to live but to die in being sent and scattered, propelled out into the world. This is paradoxical. This is foolishness. A sand castle paradigm of

church makes explicit that by pretending to be established or by trying to be permanent, churches will ultimately dry out and crack under the heat of the sun, because this posture is antithetical to the way of the cross.

Frankly, the definition of the *ecclesia crucis* presented in this introduction does not have the look or feel of a church as many perceive church to be. Whether within a tall-steepled church, a rural country church, a Gothic cathedral, or the sprawling suburban church campus, congregational life today for many Christians is much more an experience of organizational membership than an experience of being a people gathered under the cross. Eagerly reflecting business or economic models that reward being greater, bigger, stronger, faster, and progressive, congregations actively avoid and deny death. For in the pyramid that is the committee structure of many congregations, eyes look upward to see a congregational hierarchy, established norms, and static roles for members to fulfill. With pews and mortgages, committee structures and membership classes that are akin to orientation sessions complete with slick marketing materials that make assimilation into programmatic structures seem easy, the church has become "professional," hoping that being professional will reinforce its established position within the public sphere—an establishment that has been waning in recent years.

Sand castles are not established or permanent structures, although they do have temporary form. So, too, the Christian church is given form by the means of grace: word, sacrament, and the mutual conversation and consolation among brothers and sisters.[27] Church happens in situated moments when the means of grace are present. These central practices form the church—hearing and proclaiming the word, washing in the waters of baptism and daily affirmation of that new birth, eating and drinking for the forgiveness of sins, worshipping, praying, and gathering together to console and to encourage. This helpful Lutheran definition of church as the gathering of sisters and brothers where the word is proclaimed and the sacraments are rightly administered can be understood as a very fluid and flexible definition of church, but it can also be a very insular way of defining the form of the church.[28]

In an effort to preserve the church and erect permanent structures to house the means of grace, the church turns inward, in what Martin Luther has called the typical condition of humanity, *incurvatus in se* (curved in upon oneself). To be fluid and flexible, these central practices need not be established or preserved but turned outward as the means of grace for the world. Thus, the church is rightly church *when newcomers are present.* It is the newcomers who embody the presence of the world in their implicit question, "Who are *my people*?" Then the

discipleship practices of the church are given a new orientation as newcomers ask their questions alongside established members.

Newcomers step over the threshold of the mainline North American congregation for a variety of reasons. Newcomers may or may not know what to expect of the church, its programs, its culture, and its expectations. Newcomers may or may not have any sense of what will be expected of them in terms of contributing to the congregational life, tithing, volunteering, or practices related to prayer, Bible study, and Christian fellowship. But it usually does not matter what expectations or intuitions newcomers bring to a congregation, because what newcomers encounter is a comfortable, closed gathering in which their presence is not necessary needed. Newcomers are offered the static welcome of an organization seeking to be professional with an aim to assimilate the newcomer into the structure of the church. This static welcome is often found in new-member classes, pastor classes, fellowship opportunities, and rites of welcome in public worship. The aim of this welcome is often to talk about the church and its structures and the congregation's programs by presenting an array of private or public opportunities for future newcomer participation.

I will suggest that welcoming newcomers involves facilitating participation in the central practices of discipleship, alongside established membership of the congregation in the present, not the future. This is not "talking about" discipleship practices but actually doing practices of discipleship. No one possesses the action or the meaning that arises from the interaction of the gathering. These practices are personal, announcing a promise, and at the same time turn the self toward others, listening for a question from within the congregation and beyond. A cruciform catechesis of the *ecclesia crucis* is where congregations live in the tension between question and promise, practicing a confession of faith, hope, and love through the means of grace by welcoming newcomers into practices where faith meets doubt, hope meets despair, and love meets the suffering world.

Welcoming newcomers involves listening deeply to the raw data of human experience that arise out of their desire for belonging and facilitating their participation in practices of discipleship. Facilitating participation and creating a space for deep inquiry move discipleship practices toward the congregation's periphery, where newcomers dwell, if not beyond the gathering of the congregation altogether. In this very process of welcoming newcomers, God saves the church, moving the church into relationship with the world. This is a church that lives for the joy of building sand castles. This is a pretty foolish way

of being church and a way that we have perhaps forgotten. We have forgotten how to begin.

Notes

1. Dennis Randall, "Stupendous Sandcastles: An Imagination Station Activity," *Family Education* (Pearson Education), http://fun.familyeducation.com/summer/outdoor-games/35066.html.

2. Unlike a habit, which is usually located in the individual, practices are inherently social and shared. Practices are not instinctual. A practice is a shared history of learning.

3. Catechesis and the family of words that surround this term, including catechetics, catechisms, and the catechumenate, have a long history within the field of Christian education. I recognize that catechesis is a foreign term within some congregations and for others might be a stumbling block. I believe catechesis is a powerful term. Recognizing that this echoing catechesis occurs within the life of a people living under the cross, I will explore the cruciform nature of catechesis as the tension between question and promise.

4. Matt. 18:20.

5. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 231.

6. Douglas John Hall correlates the covenantal promise with the cross of Golgotha's claim upon this world. See Douglas John Hall, "The Theology of the Cross: A Usable Past," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, http://www.elca.org/~/media/Files/Growing in Faith/Vocation/Word and Service Ministry/TheTheologyoftheCross_pdf.ashx.

7. Systematic theologian Paul Tillich describes the method of correlation as making "an analysis of the human situation out of which the existential questions arise, and [demonstrating] that the symbols used in the Christian message are answers to these questions." Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1:62. The tension I speak of between question and promise is more complex than a simple correlation between the existential questions of the situation and the answer drawn from the symbols found in the gospel, if only because that correlation is just too calm and dispassionate in its less-than-thick description of human life in its plurality. See Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:13–16. Douglas John Hall acknowledges, "For Tillich . . . the thing that prevents the theological answer from assuming the status of the absolute is the human question, which is never silenced, and the situation, which keeps changing." Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 45. There is room for this "theory" to take on the particulars of everyday life, and I, like Hall, would like to push the correlation toward the realm of thick description. Hall asks, "What if the highly specific realities of [Tillich's] situation had been permitted to make their way as it were, more geographically and explicitly into the pages of his three-volume system of theology? It is one thing to speak theoretically about the correlation of situation and message, question and answer; it is something else to bring into proximity to one another the traditions of the faith and the existing events, conflicts, and attitudes of one's world." Hall, *Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 1:360. The question embodied in the newcomer cannot be denied its complexity, and resists a simple theological answer. I refrain from using the word *answer*, preferring to describe the gospel as "promise."

8. Heb. 13:2 (KJV).

9. "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40). For when you welcomed strangers, the church welcomes Christ. "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7).

10. The Pauline virtues of 1 Cor. 13:13 and 1 Thess. 1:3.

11. Douglas John Hall, *Why Christian?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 88–116.

12. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans, Glosses and Scholia*, vol. 25, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, trans. Jacob A. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 366.

13. I am using the phrase "marks of the church" differently than is typical for Lutherans. Martin Luther often wrote of seven marks of the church: word, sacrament (baptism and Holy Communion), forgiveness, ordination, prayer, and "the holy possession of the cross." Gordon W. Lathrop and Timothy J. Wengert, *Christian Assembly: Marks of the Church in a Pluralistic Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004). I use these marks in the same spirit of flexibility as Wengert and Lathrop observed: "In the writing of Luther and Melanchthon, the list of the church marks varied, with one of the most complete lists coming in Luther's tract on the church in 1539. Different situations . . . or . . . different biblical texts gave rise to different lists. However, all invariably went back to the word and the sacraments (visible words and their effects on the Christian community's confession of faith and love)" (83–84).

14. Douglas John Hall, "Theology of the Cross: Challenge and Opportunity for the Post-Christendom Church," in *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, ed. Marit Trelstad (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 255.

15. Hall, *Why Christian?*, 91.

16. Ibid., 93.

17. Hall, "Theology of the Cross," 255.

18. Ibid., 256.

19. Ibid., 257.

20. I appreciate this phrase found in the philosophical work of Martha C. Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 6.

21. Hall, *The Cross in Our Context*, 195.

22. Hall, *Thinking the Faith*, 74.

23. Hall, *The Cross in Our Context*, 55.

24. Ibid., 137.

25. Ibid., 137.

26. Ibid., 40–41.

27. Describing the marks as word, sacrament, and "mutual conversation and consolation among the brothers and sisters," these authors emphasize the importance of the church as a gathered body of believers. Richard H. Bliese and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005).

28. "The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly." Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 43.