

What is in the study

The following provides a summary of each session's content.

Part A: A framework for conversation, prayer, and action

A1 The Global Reach of Genetics introduces the study of genetics from a faith perspective by focusing on the question “what is going on” in the world today? It describes how we are moving into an age of genetics that confronts us with unprecedented choices and daunting responsibilities. These choices and responsibilities often lead to profound disorientation and sharp controversy as we try to make wise decisions. This session suggests, also, that each of us has a personal responsibility in these developments, and it sketches some of the challenges—as well as bedrock commitments—for Christians living in these times.

A2 Caring for Neighbors explores how the study of genetics affects broad human self-understanding, and how Christians understand their God-given vocation. It explores the relation of humans to the rest of nature, and then reminds us of the global scope of genetic developments—developments experienced in a variety of ways by people in different parts of the global village. The session also discusses the problems of sin, failure, and human limitation. It concludes by charting the meaning of God's love that washes over us in our baptism, giving us profound vocational direction. This direction calls us to love, to careful thought, and to responsible action that seek to bring out the potential good of genetics while avoiding the potential harm.

A3 Human Power Today investigates the important question of what it means to be a human being in light of our relationship to God, and with an eye on how advances in genetics are interpreted in our society. The first section identifies some troubling ways of thinking about human beings related to what might be called “the gene myth.” The second then sketches Christian ways to think about being human in relation to God, the creation, and to one another in the contemporary world.

A4 Christian Responsibility Today considers the moral or ethical resources that Christians can turn to as they ponder the developments and social issues with which genetics confronts society. The first segment explores Lutheran convictions about scripture as a resource for the moral life, while the second identifies values that all people of good will might claim as touchstones for living in the genetics age. The last segment concludes by looking at several relevant moral resources taken from established social teachings of the ELCA.

A5 Toward a Lutheran Ethic This session brings together insights from previous sessions and invites reflection on the nature of Lutheran ethics in the age of genetics. It first presents elements for a moral framework, and then invites the reader to exercise moral imagination and judgment in evaluating these principles by trying them on for size. It concludes with a reminder of the bed-rock of faith, life, and action—the gracious and justifying promise of God.

Part B: Exploring responsibilities and engaging issues

B1 Genetics and Congregations encourages conversation on how congregations might address genetics or genetics technology issues today. We must be prepared to understand enough of the science and to listen to the potential implications posed by genetics and biotechnology in order to consider how we, as Christians, might respond to the questions. Within congregations are families affected by the chronic nature of genetic conditions, people living in the midst of biotechnology they had no idea would impact their lives, and people called to advocacy for change because of their belief that in God's world life should be different.

B2 Genetics and Human Identity reflects on the issue of genetics and human identity and takes up the issue of genetic determinism. The session addresses questions such as: As Christians, should we consider our genome to be our essence? Is the answer to "who we are" found in the genome? Do our genes lead us to sin? Can God's grace work through gene expression? Can we reduce the most sublime of our intuitions to gene expression?

B3 Genetics and Social Location asks you to reflect upon the significance of social location for assessing the ethical dimensions of genetic research and treatments. The focus will be upon communities of color and women of color. You will be asked to reflect upon your own social location and how it has shaped your ethical worldview.

B4 Genetic Testing and Screening invites you to learn more about genetic testing and screening and to reflect about the personal challenges it presents. Three examples are provided from real life situations: cancer genetics, prenatal testing, or teens at risk. The first section of reflection describes vital background about each example. The subsequent section provides key ideas about each in relation to faith. Readers are then invited to reflect at length on one of these examples as a way to explore its personal challenge.

B5 Genetic Engineering in Agriculture considers concerns around the use of genetically engineered crops, animals, and microbes in agriculture. Scientists, farmers, agribusiness representatives, activists, policy makers, and food eaters hold a variety of different, complex, and even mixed perspectives on how to promote the promising aspects and prevent the perilous ones. Activists on competing sides of the issues produce strongly worded position statements that may help to inform the dialogue, but may also serve to mislead and misinform. To promote debate and discernment, this session introduces some of the key issues that shape people's perspectives on the promises, perils, and controversies.

B6 Stem Cell Research and Therapy offers an overview of the state of stem cell research today, and identifies the key ethical issues in the debate in order to facilitate engagement with stem cell issues. By exploring these issues from a variety of perspectives, the reader will gain a deeper understanding of what is at stake in this controversy. The session hopes to aid each reader to understand why he or she holds his

or her views and why equally informed, conscientious Christians may make different judgments.

B7 Patenting Genes considers the complex matter of patenting genetic inventions or discoveries. It connects this issue to the biblical idea of blessing and curse, and asks how such patents could be blessings or curses, and for whom. The session first covers the contemporary significance of gene patents, how genes came to be patented, and the advantages and disadvantages of genetic patents. It then widens the focus to discuss genetic patents in terms of developing countries and international trade. The final set of reflections raises some biblical themes that can help us consider ethical issues in the use of gene patents and in patent laws and regulations.

B8 Enhancing Human Life explores questions of faith and witness around the use of genetic knowledge and technology to “enhance” life. Christians claim a calling to care for the disabled and to heal disease. As disciples of Jesus, we seek to restore wholeness to the brokenness of life. But suppose that new powers over mind and body, today and in the future, allow us to be “better than well” in the sense of improving upon the genetic inheritance that we receive from God through biological parents. Is this a new calling for people and society or not? If so, what should this mean practically? If we can make people better, do we owe this to future generations?