

What Lutherans Believe

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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The LC-MS and other Lutheran Bodies

QUESTION: What are the main differences between the Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)?

ANSWER: In terms of the official position of our two church bodies as reflected in formally adopted statements of belief and practice, the three main areas of difference between the LCMS and the ELCA are the following:

1. The doctrine and authority of Scripture. The LCMS believes that the Bible is without error in all that it says. The ELCA avoids making such statements, holding that Scripture is not necessarily always accurate on such matters as history and science.

Differences between the LCMS and the ELCA on the authority of Scripture also help to explain why the ELCA ordains women to the pastoral office, while the LCMS does not (based on 1 Cor. 14:33-36 and 1 Tim. 2:11-14).

Similarly, on the basis of what Scripture clearly teaches (Rom. 1:18-28; 1 Cor. 6:9), the LCMS position on homosexual behavior is unequivocal: homosexual behavior is contrary to God's will, while the ELCA has declared that it lacks a consensus regarding what Scripture teaches about homosexual activity.

Consequently, those who disagree with one another in the ELCA have been called to respect the 'bound conscience' of the others. The ELCA has also determined to allow the ordination of practicing homosexuals as long as they are in a life-long, committed relationship.

2. The commitment to Lutheran confessional writings. The ELCA, while affirming its commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as witnessed to in the Lutheran Confessions, also tends to emphasize the historical character of these writings and to maintain the possibility of dissent to confessional positions that do not deal directly with the Gospel itself understood in a narrow sense.

All LCMS pastors are required to affirm that the Lutheran Confessions are a correct explanation of the teachings of Scripture.

3. The level of agreement necessary to join together in one church body. While the LCMS believes the Bible requires agreement in all that the Bible teaches, the ELCA holds that disagreement in some matters of doctrine, such as the mode of Christ's presence in Holy Communion, do not prohibit church fellowship.

QUESTION: What are the main differences between the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS)?

ANSWER: From the LCMS perspective, the three main theological differences between the LCMS and the WELS are the following:

1. The biblical understanding of fellowship.

The WELS holds to what is called the "unit concept" of fellowship, which places virtually all joint expressions of the Christian faith on the same level.

In an official statement made in 1960 the WELS states, "Church fellowship should therefore be treated as a unit concept, covering every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of a common faith" (Doctrinal Statements of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1970, pp. 51-52).

The LCMS, however, has historically not understood or practiced church fellowship in this way. Our Synod, for example, has made a distinction between altar and pulpit fellowship (for which full doctrinal agreement is required) and other manifestations of Christian fellowship, such as prayer fellowship (which do not necessarily require full doctrinal agreement).

Disagreements on this issue led the Wisconsin Synod to break fellowship with the LCMS in 1961.

2. The doctrine of the ministry.

With respect to the doctrine of the ministry, since the days of C.F.W. Walther our Synod has held that the office of the public ministry (the pastoral office) according to Scripture is the one divinely established office in the church, while the church possesses the freedom to create other offices, by human institution, from time to time to assist in the carrying out of the functions of the pastoral ministry.

The WELS' Theses on Church and Ministry, however, expressly deny that the pastoral ministry is specifically instituted by the Lord in contrast to other forms of public ministry (see Doctrinal Statements, pp. 9-11; cf. the Commission on Theology and Church Relations' 1981 report on [The Ministry: Office, Procedures, and Nomenclature](#)).

3. The role of women in the church.

While both the LCMS and the WELS strongly oppose the ordination of women to the pastoral office on Scriptural grounds, the LCMS has concluded that the Scriptures do not forbid woman suffrage in the church. The WELS opposes woman suffrage in the church as contrary to Scripture.

Partner Church Bodies



The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has 38 partner churches around the world. A partner church is a church body with whom the LCMS has full altar and pulpit fellowship.

Many LCMS partner churches are also members of the International Lutheran Council, a worldwide association of confessional Lutheran church bodies.

Some LCMS partner churches came into existence through LCMS-supported mission efforts, while others have historic roots that pre-date the LCMS or that are sourced in the mission efforts of other Lutheran church bodies.

North America

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- The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) — Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, President
 - Lutheran Church - Canada (LCC) — Rev. Timothy Teuscher, President
 - Evangelical Lutheran Church of Haiti (ELCH) — Rev. Eliona Bernard, President (Eglise Evangelique Luthérienne D’Haiti)
 - The American Association of Lutheran Churches (TAALC) — Rev. Curtis E. Leins, Presiding Pastor

Africa

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- Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana (ELCG) — Dr. Paul Kofi Fynn, President
 - Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK) — Rev. Joseph Ochola Omolo, Bishop
 - Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia (ELCL) — Rev. Amos Bolay, Bishop
 - The Lutheran Church of Nigeria (LCN) — Rev. Christian Ekong, President
 - Free Evangelical - Lutheran Synod in South Africa (FELSISA) — Rev. Dr. Dieter Reinstorf, Bishop
 - Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (LCSA) — The Right Rev. Modise Maragelo, Bishop
 - Lutheran Church of Togo (ELT) — Rev. LARE Kolani Lambon, President (Eglise Luthérienne du Togo)

Asia

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- China Evangelical Lutheran Church (CELC) (Taiwan ROC) — Rev. Andrew Miao, President
 - The Lutheran Church - Hong Kong Synod (LCHKS) — Rev. Dr. Allan Yung, President
 - India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC)
 - Japan Lutheran Church — Rev. Shin Shimizu, President
 - Lutheran Church in Korea (LCK) — Rev. Young-Seok Jin, President
 - Gutnius* Lutheran Church (GLC) (Papua New Guinea) — Rev. Nicodemus Aiyene, Head Bishop
*Note: Gutnius means "Good News"
 - The Lutheran Church in the Philippines (LCP) — The Rev. Antonio Reyes, President
 - Lanka Lutheran Church (LLC) (Sri Lanka) — Rev. Govindan Nadaraja, President

Europe

- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Belgium (ELKB) — Rev. Gijsbertus van Hattem, President (Evangelisch-Lutherse Kerk in België)
- Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Denmark (ELFD) — Rev. Leif G. Jensen, President (Den evangelisk-lutherske Frikirke i Danmark)
- The Evangelical Lutheran Church of England (ELCE) — Rev. Jon Ehlers, Chairman
- Evangelical Lutheran Church - Synod of France (EEL-SF) — Rev. Martin Jautzy, President (Église Évangélique Luthérienne - Synode de France)
- Independent Evangelical - Lutheran Church (SELK-Germany) — Rev. Hans-Jörg Voigt, Bishop (Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche)
- Kazakhstan — Evangelical Lutheran Church of Almaty — Rev. Alexander Burtsev, President
- Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (ELCL) — Rev. Janis Vanags, Archbishop
- Consistory of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania (CELCL) — Rev. Mindaugas Sabutis, Bishop
- The Lutheran Church in Norway — Rev. Torkild Masvie, Bishop
- Portuguese Evangelical Lutheran Church — Rev. Adalberto Hiller, President (Igreja Evangélica Luterana Portuguesa)
- Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia (ELCIR) — Rev. Arri Kugappi, Bishop
- Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC) — Rev. Vsevolod Lytkin, Bishop

Latin America

- Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina (IELA) — Rev. Carlos Nagel, President (Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Argentina)
- Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB) — Rev. Egon Kopereck, President (Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil)
- Confessional Lutheran Church of Chile (IELCHI) — Rev. Gerardo Omar Kinan, President (Iglesia Luterana Confesional de Chile - ILC-CHILE)
- Lutheran Church of Guatemala (ILG) — The Rev. Dr. Abdiel Orozco Aguirre, President (Iglesia Luterana en Guatemala)
- Lutheran Synod of Mexico — Rev. Isaac Guadalupe Garcia Castillo, President (Sinodo Luterano de Mexico)
- The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Paraguay (IELP) — Rev. Eugenio Wentzel, President (Iglesia Evangélica Luterana del Paraguay)
- The Lutheran Church of Uruguay — Rev. André Luiz Müller, President (Iglesia Luterana San Pablo (San Pablo Lutheran Church))
- Lutheran Church of Venezuela (ILV) — Rev. Miguelángel Pérez, President (Iglesia Luterana de Venezuela)