

Where Canada's Lutherans stand

This information has been provided for persons inquiring about the organization, theology, practices and joint activities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and Lutheran Church–Canada. It was prepared in 1994 by a special committee made up of representatives of each of the churches. Further elaboration can be provided by pastors or the church offices.



ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCHES

LUTHERAN CHURCH–CANADA (LCC) was constituted in May 1988 by the congregations, pastors and teachers of the three Canadian Districts of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS). Since the formation of LCC was not brought about by any confessional differences with its parent body, the doctrine and practice of the LCMS continue to prevail in Lutheran Church–Canada.

Lutheran Church–Canada (LCMS) activity in Canada began in the 1830s in Ontario, and the 1890s in the western provinces. The East District was created in 1879, the Alberta-British Columbia District in 1921 and the Central District in 1922.

Lutheran Church–Canada has about 80,000 baptized members in 326 congregations. Its clergy roster numbers 352, with an additional 49 on the official roster of certified teachers and other professionals.

The church owns and operates two seminaries at St. Catharines and Edmonton, and Concordia University College at Edmonton.

The national office is located at 3074 Portage Ave, Winnipeg, MB R3K 0Y2. The official periodical of the church is *The Canadian Lutheran*. The Lutheran Women's Missionary League–Canada, and the Lutheran Laymen's League are official auxiliaries.

The EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA (ELCIC) came into being on January 1, 1986 through the consolidation of two churches: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada and the Lutheran Church in America – Canada Section. Previously, these churches came into being through the consolidation of eight churches.

The ELCIC has about 206,000 baptized members in 664 congregations, and some 860 pastors. (The oldest congregation is Zion Lutheran, organized in 1761 in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia.) The church is organized into five synods--British Columbia Synod, Synod of Alberta and the Territories, Saskatchewan Synod, Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario Synod, Eastern Synod.

The ownership of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon is vested in the four western synods, and ownership of Waterloo Lutheran Seminary is vested in the Eastern Synod. Three academic institutions, ranging from high school to university – Augustana University College, Luther College, Lutheran Collegiate Bible Institute – are vested in corporations whose memberships are the same as that of the conventions of the church.

The officers and national staff members are located in the Church Office at 302-393 Portage Ave, Winnipeg, R3B 3H6. Canada Lutheran is the national magazine for the church, and Esprit the magazine for the Evangelical Lutheran Women auxiliary.

CONFESSION OF FAITH

“The Synod, and every member of the Synod, accepts without reservation:

1. The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice;

2. All the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God, to wit: the three Ecumenical Creeds (the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed), the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Large Catechism of Luther, the Small Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord.”

(LCC Constitution, Article II)

While the term “Word of God” embraces more than Scripture, Scripture is in every sense “Word of God.” Human instruments were used by the Holy Spirit, who inspired both those who wrote and that which was written. LCC therefore does not hesitate to say that the Holy Scriptures are the “inspired and inerrant” Word of God.

LCC follows traditional principles of interpretation and, in general, does not approve of “higher criticism” or of any approach which appears to subject God’s Word to human judgment.

The Gospel is the key to understanding the Scriptures. To pledge allegiance to the Scriptures without surrendering joyfully to the promise of the Gospel is to misuse Scripture. At the same time, the only Gospel the church knows and proclaims is that which is revealed in the Scriptures.

“Section 1. This church confesses the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – as the one true God. It proclaims the Father as Creator and Preserver; His Son, Jesus Christ, as Redeemer and Lord; and the Holy Spirit as Regenerator and Sanctifier.

Section 2. This church confesses that the Gospel is the revelation of God’s saving will and grace in Jesus Christ, which He imparts through Word and Sacrament. Through these means of grace the Holy Spirit creates believers and unites them with their Lord and with one another in the fellowship of the Holy Christian Church.

Section 3. This church confesses the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God, through which God still speaks, and as the only source of the Church’s doctrine and the authoritative standard for the faith and life of the Church.

Section 4. This church subscribes to the documents of the Book of Concord of 1580 as witnesses to the way in which the Holy Scriptures have been correctly understood, explained and confessed for the sake of the Gospel, namely

a. The Apostles’, the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds as the chief confessions of the Christian faith;

b. The unaltered Augsburg Confession as its basic formulation of Christian doctrine;

c. Luther’s Small Catechism as a clear summary of Christian doctrine;

d. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Luther’s Large Catechism, the Smalcald Articles with the Treatise, and the Formula of Concord as further witnesses to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.”

(ELCIC Constitution, Article II)

Summary statements to describe church positions

Over the years the churches have discussed doctrinal and practical issues, some of which are addressed below:



The Mission of the Church

The Church is called to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed. Forgiveness of sins and eternal life are offered only through the Gospel of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection. No other religious system or person legitimately offers that which comes through Christ alone. It is therefore misleading to suggest that other religious systems enable one to know God in a way that leads to eternal life.

As an expression of the universal Church and as an instrument of the Holy Spirit, the mission of the ELCIC is to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people in Canada and around the world through the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments and through service in Christ's name. (ELCIC Constitution, Article IV, Section 1)

Baptism

Holy Baptism is God's gracious act by which He bestows on the baptized the gifts of forgiveness of sins and adoption into His family. We believe baptism is intended for adults as well as for infants and children who have not yet been taught the fullness of God's will, but are to be taught later. We baptize only in the name of the Triune God--Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

"In Baptism we die and rise with Christ. God acted in Christ to save us; God acts through Baptism to save us. The baptized are pardoned, cleansed and sanctified in Christ. Baptism is administered with water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When young children are baptized, the parents and sponsors are instructed; otherwise the baptismal candidates themselves are instructed. This training in discipleship continues for the life of the baptized." (Excerpts from Sacramental Practices Statement adopted 1991)

Holy Communion

Holy Communion is God's gracious act by which he nurtures and strengthens those already in the family of God. Holy Communion is the Lord's Supper, not the church's supper. It is constituted by the words of Christ, "This is my body . . . my blood." Since Holy Communion calls for "self-examination," we invite to the Lord's Table those who are capable of doing so on the basis of appropriate instruction, and who share our common confession of faith.

[Who may receive]

"In Baptism we are incorporated into the body of Christ, the Church. In Holy Communion the Church is nourished and strengthened. Therefore, we speak of and practise communion of the baptized . . . We are committed to eucharistic hospitality. Baptized persons of Lutheran and other Christian faith communities are welcomed to the Lord's Table."

(Excerpt from Sacramental Practices Statement adopted 1991)

Inclusivity

Men and women are of equal dignity and worth before God, and His love embraces both. Biblically mandated relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, etc., are part of God's good created order. That order was corrupted by the fall, and renewed by God's act of redemption, but neither the fall nor redemption abrogated God's created order.

Baptism into Christ places us into a new relationship with one another as full partners in the body of Christ, siblings in the household of God, and co-workers in the dominion of God. Baptism into Christ empowers each person with gifts for service. Women and men share in the full range of gifts and in the call to bear God's creative and redeeming Word to all the world, which is our worship and praise of God. Women and men look to the Church for sustenance of their common humanity in Christ for nurture of these gifts and for equal opportunity to exercise these gifts.

Whether or not to use gender-neutral language in the church is a matter of Christian liberty, except that where gender is used in the original text it should be faithfully translated. Although God Himself transcends sexuality, He has chosen to describe and name Himself with gender implications. These should be reflected in liturgy, prayer, etc., and need not be avoided in an attempt to be inclusive.

In liturgical and devotional material the church seeks to avoid language about God and God's people which is only and unnecessarily masculine while at the same time using accurate translations of the biblical texts.

(Excerpted from "A Theological Foundation and Vision" provided by Consulting Committee on Women and Men)

Ordering of Ministry

The office of the public ministry has been instituted by our Lord, for the administration of the means of grace, although the forms and functions of this ministry have been shaped by the church. For scriptural reasons we do not ordain women to the pastoral office.

Although the term “ordination” is not biblically defined, we limit its use to those who hold the pastoral office, and apply other terms (install, commission, etc.) to other ministries.

While we ordinarily use the word “president” to refer to one who has spiritual oversight over the church, we are not averse to using the term bishop.

God has instituted the office of the ordained ministry so that the Gospel and Sacraments remain at the heart of the Church by being properly proclaimed and administered. Men and women may become pastors and bishops having met the required standards for acceptance. In addition, a diaconal ministry for both men and women has been approved.

Worship and Liturgy

Public worship normally follows the traditional liturgy with Holy Communion. There is considerable tension in the church about the use of contemporary forms and music. This tension is, as yet, largely unresolved but under active consideration.

The congregation, remembering God’s mighty acts in the past, celebrating His abiding presence, and moving toward His promised fulfilment, will listen to the Word of God in Scripture and preaching, receive the Sacraments, and respond with confession, prayer, praise, thanksgiving, and with tithes and offerings. In order to assist members to acknowledge God’s rule over their lives, their own unity as Christ’s body on earth, and to express their relationship with God in public and in private, the congregation shall gather for worship regularly and, in accordance with the traditions of the Lutheran Church, recruit, equip and support members for leadership in worship, use appropriate worship materials, and make certain that worship has a place in other functions of the congregation.

(Approved Model Constitution for Congregations, Article III,a)

Confirmation Ministry

Children who have been baptized are ordinarily instructed (one to two years) in a process that leads to confirmation. Adults who have not previously been confirmed in the Lutheran Church are likewise instructed, even if they have been confirmed in another Christian church. The length of instruction, and the age of confirmation are within the realm of church custom. Most congregations confirm at around age 13-14, after which time the confirmands are eligible to receive communion. Some congregations prepare children for communion at about age 8-10, with further instruction (and confirmation) to follow.

“Confirmation Ministry is envisioned to be a process of daily discipleship lived out in one’s baptism. Its area of ministry is expanded from that of the youth to all persons in our congregations. Confirmation ministry is the place where all persons in the church may continually affirm their faith, and where the church continually confirms them in their faith.”

(Excerpt from Study received in Convention, 1993)

Abortion

We consider the unborn to be persons in the sight of God, and since abortion is the taking of a human life, it is not a morally justifiable option except to preserve the life of the mother, in which case it becomes a choice between the lesser of two evils. The church must offer alternatives to abortion, as well as compassion and forgiveness to those affected by it. (1988 convention resolution 88.3.04)

“Because we deeply respect human life, and as abortion involves ending a life process, abortion is a serious matter which reflects the complex nature of the human condition. While abortion may be deemed justifiable under exceptional conditions, we are called to explore redemptive alternatives that would eliminate the felt need for abortion.”

(Excerpt from Stewards of Creation, Respect for Human Life adopted 1991)

Church/Ecumenicity

We distinguish between the church in the proper sense, the whole body of Christ, and the church in the broad sense, made up of all who publicly identify themselves as believers, even though there are hypocrites among them.

The ecumenical task is not to create unity in the church in the proper sense, because the church in the proper sense is already one under the headship of Christ. The ecumenical task is directed at the church in the broad sense. We are both called and compelled to overcome obstacles and remove differences among the believers, seeking to bring confession and practice into conformity with the Word of God.

We distinguish between fellowship in Word and Sacrament, for which full agreement in doctrine is required, and cooperation in external things, for which such agreement is not essential.

The ELCIC sees its character and its powers as derived from both its congregations and from its inherent nature as part of the Church universal. It regards itself as standing in the historic continuity of the communion of saints and as being an expression of that Christian fellowship in today's world.

(ELCIC Constitution, Article III, Section 3) The ELCIC in seeking to fulfil its ecumenical commitment participates in dialogues, councils of churches and shared ministries.

Homosexuality

Homosexuality is a distortion of God's intention for the human race and homosexual thoughts, desires, words and deeds are contrary to God's will. The Synod encourages all its pastors, teachers and congregations to exercise consistent but compassionate ministry to those affected by their own homosexuality or that of others. (1993 convention, resolution 93.1.05)

The practice of the church remains the bishops' statement: "A self-declared and practicing homosexual person is not to be approved for ordination and, if already ordained, is not to be recommended for call." (Adopted by the 1993 Convention)

Independent Lutheran Organizations

Lutheran Church-Canada relates to auxiliary organizations which are broadly supportive of the church's mission and are listed in the church's by-laws. Listed service organizations have a narrower focus and may be recognized as such when certain conditions are met.

These may be recognized and a statement of relationship developed with the related unit of the church. Pastors may be called by the church to serve in these organizations.

Non-Christian Organizations

Individuals, both pastors and lay persons, are expected to avoid membership or participation in any organization that in its objectives, ceremonies, or practices is contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ or the faith and life of the Christian church.

"Each congregation of this church shall include in its constitution or bylaws an article which prohibits corporate worship with any organization which practices the forms of religion without confessing faith in the Triune God and in Jesus, the eternal and incarnated Son of God, as our only Saviour." (ELCIC Constitution, Article VI, Section 4)

Joint activities of the churches

Through the LUTHERAN COUNCIL IN CANADA the two churches have a history of cooperation and coordination in chaplaincies in the Armed Forces and Correctional Service, in Scout/Guide materials, and in planning new missions.

Both churches have supported and provided programs for Vision TV, and have published an interpretative brochure "Lutherans in Canada" in four languages. Each year a Directory of Lutheran Churches in Canada is published.

Development and Relief, including ministry with refugees, has continued through Canadian Lutheran World Relief for over 50 years.

Conclusion

Relations between Lutherans in Canada have ebbed and flowed with changing times, issues and personalities.

Essential to any improvement in how Lutherans view one another is the recognition that the Church is God's creation and that those who are called to live within it owe one another love, understanding and honesty.

This document is not the last word in describing the two churches, or in predicting the directions in which they may go in the future. It is, however, a document written in hope – hope that God would work within us to answer the Church's ancient prayer:

"For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord."