

## The Lutheran Family

Lutherans exist all over the world and with its roughly 70-71 million members make up the largest community in Protestantism. That it assumed the name Lutheran after Martin Luther is by sheer historical coincidence. The papal bull of 1521 excommunicated Luther and his adherents by calling them Lutherans and thereby stigmatize them as heretics and schismatics. Luther and his followers protested against the use of his name calling himself a “miserable bag of worms and should not give his meaningless name to his children.” WA III,684-685. On another, less known, occasion Luther did call himself a name worth keeping if it meant thereby that one follows Christ. In fact during the first 50 years Lutherans were called Evangelicals or “Reformed churches”. That term because after 1580 then for the Calvinists whereas Lutherans were called Lutherans.

### Stations in Luther’s life may show some particular traits of

#### Lutheranism vis-à-vis other positions. Here are a few examples:

1. How can I find a merciful God? That constituted a discovery of the Gospel versus egocentric or anthropocentric theology of the law and human righteousness and reestablished the theocentric or Christocentric message of Christ’s salvation. Many call this a Copernican revolution. Luther worked from a deep guilt consciousness, harassed by sin and finding a way to eradicate this guilt.
2. Luther crossed four stations to come to that conclusions: a. **Occamism**—after William of Occam who for one held that reason and revelation are both gifts from God and that reason could not appreciate the supranatural. Faith can only apprehend the miracles but not comprehend them. Second, Occam posited this God as the Absolute will who be responsible of man’s justification. But Luther felt that this absolute God had excluded him through predestination from salvation and so he could not find comfort in this Absolute God. Second, **Augustine**: sin and grace; which differed from the Pelagian view of sin and denial of original sin. Augustine further taught that concupiscence is truly sin and constant inclination to evil. And for Luther original was the chief or capital sin. The chief point from Augustine is that man does not possess the capacity to merit “grace” and to work out his salvation, and that grace is not a quality in man but rather God’s favor, which alone can begin and complete man’s justification. Third, **Mysticism**: which like Tauler held that the soul has the right and the capacity to enter directly into union with the naked God. Tauler emphasized complete mortification, total surrender to God, destroy every egocentricity, and it seemed at first appealing to Luther. But it the aggravated his spiritual condition because complete abnegation, total passivity, was what Luther could not achieve. To Luther his impurity of heart kept him from the souls mystical union with God. Thus in negative way mysticism drove him to the incarnate word as He is revealed in Holy Scripture. However, Tauler’s mysticism also positively helped Luther to keep a personal relation of man and his God against the Roman sacramental and sacerdotal system. Fourth, **Staupitz** who brought Luther closer to a Christ-centered faith. Because now he saw Christ’s wounds as Gospel, as good news and not as a “new law”.
3. Luther’s discovery has been summarized as *sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide*. Sola Scriptura is both a formal and material principle. Formal: Scripture; Material principle: Christocentric and justification. Thus, the word in Scripture became an

- objective reality. And the Gospel became “good news” in contrast to the law. The concept of grace stood apart from Roman Catholicism which cannot accept the word alone. And sola fide stands in relation to sola gratia, if grace is alone then faith alone also excludes all works. Thus when Luther posited the three solas they stood against two parties: a. the anti-Roman Catholic position against their religious authority, the way of salvation, the nature and function of the church; b. the antispiritualistic position in the doctrinal areas of the means of grace and the ministry. In the antispiritualistic controversy Luther rejected the radical nature of these enthusiasts who were throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Some became enthusiasts others mystics and even anarchists as reaction against Rome’s sacramentalism and sacerdotalism. They believe that the Holy Spirit works directly in man and gathers a congregation of saints without the word or sacraments. They also spoke out against social abuses and rejected all forms of government. The Reformation that started middle of the road was in danger of ending in a revolution. Three types of enthusiasts or spiritualists: a. 1522/1528 against Karlstadt which made Luther see clearer the objectivity of the means of grace because Karlstadt’s extreme mysticism dismissed the Lord’s Supper, etc and posited instead perfect union with God and with that moral perfection. Thus means of grace were a hindrance. And he thought that the congregation of holy people is supreme and may introduce a form of government with Old Testament laws. B. 1521 Anabaptists or Zwickau prophets and later Thomas Muentzer. The Anabaptists were anti government, and anti-social institutions and direct work of Holy Spirit against the means of grace. They were ecclesiastical and social anarchists; c. Zwingli and Schwenkfeld where there was a disagreement over the Holy Spirit’s work. Luther emphasized the total objectivity of God’s word in word and sacrament and the necessity of the public ministry and that this must be distinguished from the priesthood of all believers.
4. In controversy with Rome and enthusiasts, Luther emphasized the proper distinction of church and state which is a logical outcome of law and Gospel, and that secular government is concerned with the physical welfare of man. The church deals only with spiritual matters, such as forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation.

(For a theological description of Lutheranism, see **Religious bodies of America, pp. 127ff.**)

### **Lutheranism as an organization today:**

Lutheranism does constitute its own distinctive character in World Ecumenicism. However, the Lutheran community is divided into three major groups: The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the much smaller counter organization the International Lutheran Council (ILC) and the even smaller Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC). We shall examine both the LWF and ILC in detail and then proceed to highlight a few events that have taken place in the years after WWII.

#### **1. The Lutheran World Federation<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> [www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org)

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has 140 member churches in 79 countries all over the world. In total it embraces about 66.7 million of the world's 70 million Lutherans. The Federation was founded in 1947 in the Swedish city of Lund in the aftermath of the Second World War to coordinate the activities of the many differing Lutheran churches. It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. Meeting normally every six years, the Assembly is the LWF's highest decision-making body and it is overseen by a President, currently Rev. Muib Younan from Palestine, a General Secretary, currently Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko and a Treasurer. Since 1984, the member churches are in pulpit and altar fellowship, with common doctrine as the basis of membership and mission activity. Thus far the LWF General Assemblies and their themes have been:

- 1947 - Lund, Sweden, *The Lutheran Church in the World Today*
- 1952 - Hanover, Germany, *The Living Word in a Responsible Church*
- 1957 - Minneapolis, USA, *Christ Frees and Unites*
- 1963 - Helsinki, Finland, *Christ Today*
- 1970 - Evian, France, *Sent into the World*
- 1977 - Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, *In Christ - A New Community*
- 1984 - Budapest, Hungary, *In Christ - Hope for the World*
- 1990 - Curitiba, Brazil, *I Have Heard the Cry of My People*
- 1997 - Hong Kong, China, *In Christ - Called to Witness*
- 2003 - Winnipeg, Canada, *For the Healing of the World*<sup>2</sup>

The LWF had her eleventh Assembly, July 22-27, 2010 in Stuttgart, Germany under the theme "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread." An estimated 1,000 people, including 418 delegates from the member churches participated in the assembly.<sup>3</sup> Indicative of the LWF ecumenical character is that the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams, head of the worldwide Anglican Communion, delivered the keynote address to the Assembly on 22 July. One of the key actions of this assembly was the adoption of an LWF statement asking for forgiveness from Mennonites for the persecution of Anabaptists by Lutherans in the 16th century and for the legacy of such condemnations to the present day. The Assembly's agenda also included presentations on the implications of its theme, the petition for "daily bread" in the contexts of climate change and food security, debt, and HIV and AIDS.

Indicative of the LWF is that it is not just an assembly loosely tying together members churches from all over the world, but it makes worship and the celebration of the Lord's Supper an important feature of its Assemblies. The above themes as discussed in the LWF Assemblies in Stuttgart are indicative of its themes overall ranging from theology to practice and of addressing pertinent world concerns of racism, economic exploitation, earthquakes and diseases.

One important project of the LWF in the 90s captured the attention of entire ecumenical world. It was the Joint Lutheran Roman Catholic discussion on justification which culminated in the event of the signing of the *Joint Declaration on Justification* (JDDJ) on October 31, 1999 between a representative of the LWF and the Roman Catholic Church.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.lutheranworld.org/Who\\_We\\_Are/LWF-Assembly\\_History.html](http://www.lutheranworld.org/Who_We_Are/LWF-Assembly_History.html)

<sup>3</sup> To follow what has happened in that LWF assembly, one may go to its website: [www.lwf-assembly.org](http://www.lwf-assembly.org)

### **Joint Declaration (1999)**

On October 31, 1999, in Augsburg, Germany, the Lutheran World Federation signed the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* with the Roman Catholic Church. Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko and Bishop Dr. Walter Kasper signed the JDDJ. The goal of that statement is an attempt to improve and address the theological divide between the two faiths in regards to the doctrine of justification. One significant mark of that *Joint Declaration*, and which caused tension in the Lutheran family, is that it stated that the mutual condemnations between the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Lutherans and the Roman Catholic Church no longer apply. That position is articulated in Thesis 5 of the *Document*:

*“The present Joint Declaration has this intention: namely, to show that on the basis of their dialogue the subscribing Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church are now able to articulate a common understanding of our justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ. It does not cover all that either church teaches about justification; it does encompass a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification and shows that the remaining differences in its explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations.”<sup>4</sup>*

Many Lutheran Catholic Dialogue meetings and documents preceded the event of the joint signing. Special attention should be drawn to the following reports: “The Gospel and the Church—“The Malta Report” (1972) and “Church and Justification” (1994) by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Commission, “Justification by Faith” (1983) of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue in the USA and “The Condemnations of the Reformation Era - Do They Still Divide?” (1986)<sup>5</sup> by the Ecumenical Working Group of Protestant and Catholic theologians in Germany. Some of these dialogue reports have been officially accepted by the churches. An important example of such reception is the binding response of the United Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Germany to the “Condemnations” study (VELKD), made in 1994 at the highest possible level of ecclesiastical recognition together with the other churches of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD).

### **Other regional agreements and influential documents:**

1. *Leuenberg Agreement (Leuenberg Concord)* (1973) is an ecumenical document adopted in 1973 by major European Lutheran and Reformed churches at the Swiss conference centre Leuenberg (near Basle). Under this agreement the churches agree on a common understanding of the Gospel, including elementary agreement on important doctrines including christology, predestination, Eucharist and justification. They declare church fellowship, understood as pulpit and table fellowship as well as communion in witness and service. The number of churches involved has grown over the years, and now includes several Methodist churches.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.lutheranworld.org/LWF\\_Documents/EN/JDDJ\\_99-jd97e.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/EN/JDDJ_99-jd97e.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> From the German: *Lehrverurteilungen, kirchentrennend? Ökumenischer Arbeitskreis Evangelischer und Katholischer Theologen*. Herausgegeben von K. Lehmann and W. Pannenberg (Freiburg im Breisgau/Göttingen: Herder / Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986).

The churches involved were originally joined in the “Leuenberg Church Fellowship”. In 2003 this was renamed the “Community of Protestant Churches in Europe”. In 2000, the Church of Norway signed the Leuenberg Agreement. In 2001, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark also joined the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. Twenty-five years after the adoption of the Leuenberg Agreement shows how influential this document has been for relationships between Lutherans and the Reformed churches not just in Europe, but also in America. For example, the Leuenberg Agreement has been confirmed by the sister churches in America with the signing of “*Formula of Agreement*”. As much as the Lutheran World Federation hails the Leuenberg Concord a step forward in the actual realization of communion among Lutherans and Reformed. Other theologians and scholars, particularly those belonging to churches of the ILC (see below), have criticized as being a compromise of the Marburg Colloquy of 1529 between Luther and the Reformed represented by Ulrich Zwingli.<sup>6</sup>

The agreements listed below represent Lutheran Agreements with the Anglican community. Except for the first statement, the others represent the introduction of regional communion relationships, which includes full sacramental sharing and interchangeability of ministers:

1. *The Reuilly Common Statement*, (1999), between the British and Irish Anglican churches and French Lutheran and Reformed churches. The Reuilly Common Statement (1999) was signed between the Lutheran and Reformed Churches of France and the British and Irish Anglican Churches encouraging each other to implement steps to closer fellowship in as many areas of Christian life and witness as possible. This is an agreement on the Meissen model (signed 1988) which means that differences in the understanding of the episcopacy still stand in the way of realizing a full communion relationship.
2. *The Porvoo Common Statement*, 1993, between Nordic and Baltic Lutheran churches and British and Irish Anglican churches. It means that if a priest ordained in the Church of England moves to Sweden, and fulfils the canonical requirements of that Church (and speaks Swedish), they can function and be licensed as a priest in Sweden without needing to do anything except go through their processes of appointment and admission. Similarly priests from the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches (except Latvia and Denmark) can – and do – serve in the British and Irish Anglican Churches.
3. *Called to Common Mission*, 2000, between the Episcopal Church, USA, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
4. *The Waterloo Agreement*, 2000, between the Anglican Church of Canada and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.
5. *Common Ground*, 2001 (Australia).
6. There were other regional documents signed between Lutherans and other denominations such as *The Formula of Agreement*, 1998, took place in the USA of establishing full communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in

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<sup>6</sup> One may see here Hermann Sasse, *This is My Body* (Adelaide, S.A.: Luther Publishing House, 1977). See also the concerned voices in *The Springfielder* XXXVI, No. 8, December 1972.

America, on the one hand, and the Presbyterian Church in the USA, the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ, on the other.

In **Germany** the Lutheran State Churches or territorial churches (German: Landeskirchen) united on July 8, 1948 to form the **Vereinigte Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche Deutschlands** (VELKD, English: The United Evangelical-Lutheran Church). It embraces about eleven million Lutherans from eight territorial or State churches. The goal of this union is to further and preserve the unity of Lutherans in Germany. The common confession shared by all is the unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism of Martin Luther. Churches in the VELKD are: Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Bayern; Evangelisch-Lutherische Landeskirche in Braunschweig; Evangelisch-Lutherische Landeskirche Hannovers; Evangelisch-Lutherische Landeskirche Mecklenburgs; Evangelische Kirche in Mitteldeutschland; Nordelbische Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche; Evangelisch-Lutherische Landeskirche Sachsens; Evangelisch-Lutherische Landeskirche Schaumburg-Lippe.

However, not all Lutheran churches joined the VELKD mainly in resistance to the ordination of women and open fellowship with the Lord's Supper. These churches are: the small Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Baden (not the same church as the „Evangelische Landeskirche in Baden“); the Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche (ELFK); the Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche (SELK). The last mentioned church, the SELK was formed in 1974 from a number of smaller churches located in all of Germany. In 1989 after the fall of Berlin wall initial discussions about the merging of the Evangelical-Lutheran Freikirche (located administratively in Leipzig, former East Germany) with the SELK began. However, that fellowship was never realized. The ELFK established fellowship with the Wisconsin Lutheran Church in the United States (WELS) and the smaller Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), also in the United States. These three churches practice a strict oversight of fellowship that extends beyond the Lord's Supper also to prayer. They also follow an understanding of pastoral ministry that embraces equally both pastors and teachers, they dismiss the ordination of women. It is on the basis of prayer fellowship and ministry that the fellowship between the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the WELS was severed in 1962. Of the German churches, the LCMS has fellowship with the SELK.

### **Partner Churches of the LWF**

The largest member churches are (with number of members in millions according to the 2008 statistics).<sup>7</sup>

1. Church of Sweden (6.75)
2. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (5.3)
3. Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (5.3)
4. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (4.6)
5. Church of Denmark (4.5)
6. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (4.5)

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<sup>7</sup> [www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org)

7. Protestant Christian Batak Church, Indonesia (4.2)
8. Church of Norway (4.0)
9. Malagasy Lutheran Church (3.0)
10. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover, Germany (3.0)

## **In Europe**

Austria: Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria; Belarus: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States (ELKRAS); Germany: Church of Lippe (Lutheran Section), Evangelical Church in Central Germany, Evangelical Church of Pomerania, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Baden; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Brunswick; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Oldenburg; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg; Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover; Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mecklenburg; Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony; Evangelical Lutheran Church of Schaumburg-Lippe; Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad; North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church; Belgium: Lutheran Church of Belgium: Arlon and Christian Mission (*Recognized Congregation*); Croatia: Evangelical Church in the Republic of Croatia; Czech Republic: Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren; Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession; Denmark: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark; Estonia: Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church; Finland: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland; France: Evangelical Lutheran Church of France; Malagasy Protestant Church in France; Union of Protestant Churches of Alsace and Lorraine; Hungary: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary Iceland The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland Ireland The Lutheran Church in Ireland (*Recognized Congregation*) Italy: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy; Latvia: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia; Lithuania: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania; Netherlands: Protestant Church in the Netherlands; Norway: Church of Norway; The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway; Poland: Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland; Romania: Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania; Russian Federation: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States; Serbia: Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia; Slovak Republic: Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic; Slovenia: Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovenia; Sweden: Church of Sweden; Switzerland: Fed. of Evang. Luth. Churches in Switzerland & in the Principality of Liechtenstein; Ukraine: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States; United Kingdom: Lutheran Church in Great Britain; The Lutheran Council of Great Britain (*Recognized Congregation*)

## **Africa**

Angola: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Angola; Botswana: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Botswana; Cameroon: Church of the Lutheran Brethren of Cameroon; Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon; Central African Republic: Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic; Congo, Democratic Rep.: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Congo; Congo, Republic: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Congo;

Eritrea: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea; Ethiopia: The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus; Ghana: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya; Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church Liberia Lutheran Church in Liberia; Madagascar: Malagasy Lutheran Church; Malawi: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi; Mozambique: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Mozambique; Namibia: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN-GELC); Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN). The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN); Nigeria: The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria; The Lutheran Church of Nigeria; Rwanda: Lutheran Church of Rwanda; Senegal: The Lutheran Church of Senegal; Sierra Leone: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sierra Leone; South Africa: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (Cape Church); Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (Natal-Transvaal); Moravian Church in South Africa; Tanzania: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania; Zambia: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zambia; Zimbabwe: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe.

## **Asia**

Australia: Lutheran Church of Australia (*Associate Member Church*) Bangladesh: Bangladesh Lutheran Church; Bangladesh Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church; Georgia: *see* Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States; Hong Kong (China): Hong Kong and Macau Lutheran Church; The Chinese Rhenish Church Hong Kong Synod; The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong; Tsung Tsin Mission of Hong Kong; India: Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Madhya Pradesh; Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Himalayan States; Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chotanagpur and Assam; India Evangelical Lutheran Church; Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church; Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church; South Andhra Lutheran Church; The Arcot Lutheran Church; The Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church; Indonesia: Batak Christian Community Church; Christian Communion of Indonesia Church in Nias (Gereja AMIN); Christian Protestant Angkola Church; Christian Protestant Church in Indonesia; Indonesian Christian Lutheran Church; Pakpak Dairi Christian Protestant Church; Protestant Christian Batak Church; Protestant Christian Church in Mentawai; Simalungun Protestant Christian Church; The Indonesian Christian Church; The Protestant Christian Church; The United Protestant Church; Israel: *see* The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan & the Holy Land; Japan: Japan Lutheran Church (*Associate Member Church*); Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church; Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church; Jordan The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan & the Holy Land; Kazakhstan: *see* Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States; Korea, Republic: Lutheran Church in Korea; Kyrgyzstan: *see* Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States; Malaysia: Basel Christian Church of Malaysia; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia; Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore; The Protestant Church in Sabah; Myanmar: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Myanmar (Lutheran Bethlehem Church); Papua New Guinea: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea; Gutnius Lutheran Church - Papua New Guinea; Philippines: Lutheran Church in the Philippines; Singapore: Lutheran Church in Singapore; Sri Lanka: Lanka Lutheran Church; Taiwan: Taiwan Lutheran Church;



The Lutheran Church of Taiwan (Republic of China); Thailand: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand; Uzbekistan: *see* Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States

### **Latin America & the Caribbean**

Argentina: Evangelical Church of the River Plate; United Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Bolivia: Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church; German-Speaking Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Bolivia (*Recognized Congregation*); Brazil: Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil; Chile: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile; Lutheran Church in Chile; Colombia: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia; St Martin's Congregation (*Recognized Congregation*); St Matthew's Lutheran Church (*Recognized Congregation*); Costa Rica: Lutheran Costa Rican Church; Evangelical Lutheran Church of Costa Rica (*Recognized Congregation*); Ecuador: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ecuador (*Recognized Congregation*); El Salvador: Salvadoran Lutheran Church; Guatemala: Evangelical Lutheran Congregation "La Epifania", (*Recognized Congregation*); Guyana: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana  
Honduras: Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras; Mexico: Mexican Lutheran Church; German-Speaking Evangelical Congregation in Mexico (*Recognized Congregation*  
Nicaragua: The Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope; Peru: Peruvian Lutheran Evangelical Church; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Peru (*Recognized Congregation*); Suriname: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Suriname; Venezuela: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Venezuela

### **North America**

Canada: Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada;

USA: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Some observations: We have listed all churches above to provide the reader with an idea of the impressive size of the Lutheran community. The countries with the largest number of individual churches next to Germany are Indonesia and India. Indonesia has many islands to contend with whereas India deals with a number of ethnic diversities. For this reason, the churches in India are in particular ethnic in nature. One should also note that many of the churches listed above embrace a large number of interest groups. Though Lutherans in Madagascar and Ethiopia are predominantly oriented towards the LWF, they also have interest groups who associate themselves with the ILC (see below) and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Ecumenical relations are thus volatile in nature and able to change within a short period.

### **International Lutheran Council (ILC)**

The **International Lutheran Council** is a worldwide association of confessional Lutheran denominations all over the world who promote the proclamation of the Gospel

according to the Lutheran Confessions. All member bodies of the ILC hold “an unconditional commitment to the Holy Scriptures as the inspired and infallible Word of God and to the Lutheran Confessions contained in the Book of Concord as the true and faithful exposition of the Word of God.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, the ILC follows a distinctly different and more confessional Lutheran agenda than its larger counterpart the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

The ILC’s expressed purpose is that member churches “*share information, study theological questions and concerns together, discuss effective coordinated means of carrying out the mission and ministry of the Church, nurture and strengthen their relationships with each other, and work toward the closest possible joint expression of their faith and confession*” (ILC Constitution).

Unlike the LWF, the member church bodies of the ILC are not required to be in church-fellowship with each other, though many of them are. The organization was constituted in 1993 at a council held in Antigua, Guatemala, although it traces its roots back to theological conferences held in many locations in the 1950s and 1960s.

As of 2007, the Council has thirty participating churches with a total number of Christians of approximately 3,450,000 adherents. Delegates to the ILC meet every two years. The council did not approve the 1999 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.

## **Members**

Membership is distinguished between full members and associate members of which there are 2: The Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) which is also an associate member of the LWF, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Peru which is a LWF recognized congregation.

## **Full Members**

**Argentina:** Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina (Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Argentina); **Belgium:** Evangelical Lutheran Church in Belgium (Evangelisch-Lutherse Kerk in België); **Bolivia:** Christian Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bolivia (Iglesia Cristiana Evangélica Luterana de Bolivia); **Brazil:** Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil); **Canada:** Lutheran Church—Canada; **Chile:** Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Republic of Chile (Iglesia Evangélica Luterana de la República de Chile); **China (Hong Kong SAR):** Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod; **China, Republic of (Taiwan):** China Evangelical Lutheran Church; **Denmark:** Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Denmark; **France:** Evangelical Lutheran Church—Synod of France and Belgium; **Germany:** Independent Evangelical—Lutheran Church (Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche); **Ghana:** Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana - also a full member of the Lutheran World Federation; **Guatemala:** Lutheran Church of Guatemala (Consejo Luterano Iglesia Luterana en Guatemala); **Haiti:** Evangelical

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<sup>8</sup> See official website: [www.ilc-online.org](http://www.ilc-online.org)

Lutheran Church of Haiti (Eglise Evangelique Luthérienne D’Haiti); **India:** India Evangelical Lutheran Church - also a full member of the Lutheran World Federation; **Japan:** Japan Lutheran Church - also an associate member of the Lutheran World Federation; **Kenya:** Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya - also a full member of the Lutheran World Federation; **Korea, South:** Lutheran Church in Korea - also a full member of the Lutheran World Federation; **Mexico:** Lutheran Synod of Mexico (Sinodo Luterano de Mexico); **Nigeria:** Lutheran Church of Nigeria; **Papua New Guinea:** Gutnius Lutheran Church; **Paraguay:** Evangelical Lutheran Church of Paraguay (Iglesia Evangélica Luterana del Paraguay); **Philippines:** Lutheran Church in the Philippines - *also a full member of the Lutheran World Federation*; **Portugal:** Evangelical Lutheran Church of Portugal; **Russia:** Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia - *also a full member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)*; **South Africa:** Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa (FELSISA); Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (LCSA); **Sri Lanka:** Lanka Lutheran Church - *also a full member of the Lutheran World Federation*; **United Kingdom:** Evangelical Lutheran Church of England; **United States of America:** Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod; American Association of Lutheran Churches; **United Kingdom:** Evangelical Lutheran Church of England; **United States of America:** Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod; American Association of Lutheran Churches; **Venezuela:** Lutheran Church of Venezuela (Iglesia Luterana de Venezuela)

### **Recent Merger Developments and Fellowship Declarations among Lutherans in North America**

In the United States, the Lutheran community experienced significant changes and formative events along denominational lines after WWII. The following passage is fairly descriptive of the situation: “*Despite the tragic consequences of World War I and World War II for some Lutherans in the United States—especially German congregations—the twentieth century brought about a time of coming together of various Lutheran traditions in the form of mergers.*”<sup>9</sup> The **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)** officially came into existence on January 1, 1988, through the merging of three churches. It is the largest Lutheran denomination of about 4,633,887 baptized members and the seventh-largest religious body in the United States headquartered in Chicago, Illinois. The next two largest Lutheran denominations are **the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LCMS)** (with approximately 2.4 million members) and the **Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS)** (with approximately 390,000 members). There are also many smaller Lutheran church bodies in the United States such as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) which before 1957 was known as the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (also known as “Little Norwegian” Synod) with approximately 19,945 baptized members in 142 established congregations and 12 mission churches and with its headquarters in Mankato, Minnesota.<sup>10</sup> In addition,

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<sup>9</sup> Craig van Gelder, *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 216.

<sup>10</sup> Frank S. Mead, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*. Ninth Edition. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 142-144. In 1946 the ELS established its own seminary, also in Mankato, MN, called

a new Lutheran Church body, the **North American Lutheran Church (NALC)** was formed at Grove City, Ohio in August 2010. Behind that formation were the two conservative *Lutheran CORE* and *Word Alone* organizations in the ELCA. These two had opposed the vote and condemned it as an open rejection of scriptural authority. Bishop Paul Spring was elected as the first bishop of the NALC.

The creation of the NALC was also praised by representatives from the **Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC)**, an association of approximately 495 congregations that have severed ties with the ELCA.

None of the above three churches (ELCA, LCMS and WELS) share official altar and pulpit fellowship with one another. Until 1963 that was different. For until then there was the *Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America* (established in 1872) which was a Lutheran joint fellowship organization between the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). Then in 1963 due to doctrinal differences over prayer fellowship and ministry, this joined fellowship was dissolved. Already in 1955, the ELS suspended its fellowship with the LCMS over such doctrinal disagreements, and in 1963 it withdrew from the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. However, it retained its fellowship with the WELS. The WELS severed its fellowship relations with the LCMS in 1961, and also withdrew from the Synodical Conference in 1963.<sup>11</sup> In 1993, the ELS and WELS—working with a number of 20 worldwide Lutheran churches, some of which had been founded through mission work by both synods—founded the **Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC)**. The LCMS in turn joined the International Lutheran Council (ILC) together with about 31 other partner churches around the world. Next to the Lutheran World Federation, the ILC is the second largest umbrella organization of Lutheran churches.

As stated above, the formation of the ELCA in 1982 occurred with the merging of three large church bodies: **the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC)**. These three ELCA's predecessor churches were themselves the product of previous mergers and splits among various independent Lutheran synods in the United States. The details are somewhat difficult to follow and mentioned here only in broad strokes. The Synod of the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (NLCA) changed its name to the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) in 1946. In 1960, the ELC joined with other Lutheran churches such as the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (UELC) to form the American Lutheran Church (ALC). The ALC had a membership of about 2.25 million members mostly of German, Norwegian or Danish background living in central Midwest mostly in Minnesota. Since it was conservative by nature such as

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Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. It carries on an active home mission program and now has more than 140 congregations in many states. It also has foreign missionaries deployed in Peru and Chile in South America and in Ukraine, Latvia, and Czech Republic in Eastern Europe.

<sup>11</sup> F.E. Mayer, *The Religious Bodies of America*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (St. Louis: CPH, 1961), 190.

affirming inerrancy of Scripture, the ALC joined fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. This selective fellowship between LCMS congregations and ALC congregations still continued for a few years after the ALC joined the ELCA in 1982.

The **Lutheran Church in America** (LCA) came into existence in 1962 when the following churches merged: The United Lutheran Church in America, the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, and the Danish American Evangelical Lutheran Church. The LCA had a membership of about 2.8 million members whose heritage goes back to Germany, Sweden, Slovakia, Denmark and Finland. Its demographic focus was on the East Coast (centered on Pennsylvania), with large numbers in the Midwest and some presence in the Southern Atlantic states. There are notable exceptions, but LCA-background churches tend to be more liturgical than ALC-background churches. Its theological orientation ranged from moderately liberal to neo-orthodox, with tendencies toward conservative Pietism in some rural and small-town congregations.

The **Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches** (AELC) was formed in 1976. The formation was largely precipitated by events associated with the walkout at Concordia St. Louis (see below) and the formation of a seminary in exile (called seminex) and the congregations that left the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod in that split. The AELC brought about 100,000 members into the ELCA in 1982 whose heritage came mostly from Germany.<sup>12</sup>

### **Full Communion Fellowships through ELCA**

Currently the ELCA has declared full communion fellowship with a number of denominations in the USA. The characteristics of such full fellowship is defined as follows: “*Full communion is when two churches develop a relationship based on a common confessing of the Christian faith and a mutual recognition of baptism and sharing of the Lord’s Supper.*”<sup>13</sup>

This does not mean that two churches merge; rather, in reaching agreements, churches also respect differences. These denominations likewise jointly worship, may exchange clergy, and also share a commitment to evangelism, witness and service in the world.

Currently the Full Communion Fellowship is in effect with the Presbyterian Church (USA) (1997); Reformed Church in America; United Church of Christ (1997); Episcopal Church (1999); The Moravian Church (1999); United Methodist Church (2009).

The **Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod** is headquartered in St. Louis with a membership of about 2,4 million members. It supports two seminaries Concordia Seminary in St. Louis and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and 10 colleges all over the United States. Until the 1961 it shared with the Synodical

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<sup>12</sup> Mead, *Ibid.*, 142-144. One may access also <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/History.aspx>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Full-Communion-Partners.aspx>

Conference a seminary called Immanuel Lutheran College at Greensboro for the African American students. In North America, the LCMS is in fellowship with the Lutheran Church of Canada (LCC) and the American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC). The AALC was formed on November 7, 1987 as an alternative choice for churches in the American Lutheran Church (ALC) denomination who did not want to be part of the merger with two other Lutheran church bodies, Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC) which formed the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The AALC offices were located in Bloomington, Minnesota but in 2007 the national office moved to Fort Wayne, Indiana in 2007 where also their students are educated. At the time of her formation, the AALC began with 12 congregations; in 2007 it has grown to 78 congregations, with a members of about 26,537 spread across 23 states. On 16 July 2007 during the LCMS 63rd Regular Convention., the LCMS declared fellowship with the AALC.<sup>14</sup>

### **Merger Events in Canada**

#### **The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the Lutheran Church—Canada (LCC)**

In 1986, two Canadian church bodies the ELCIC and the ELCA merged to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, which is currently comprised of five synods, 613 congregations, and approximately 162,000 baptized members. The ELCIC collaborates with a number of global organizations, including the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches.<sup>15</sup> The counterpart to the ELCIC is the Lutheran Church—Canada (LCC) which was founded in 1988 when the Canadian congregations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod formed an autonomous Canadian church with three districts. The Alberta-British Columbia District offices are in Edmonton, Alberta, the Central District in Regina, Saskatchewan and the East District in Kitchener, Ontario. The denomination retains close ties with the LCMS and is a member of the ILC with other Lutheran church bodies.

### **Events reflecting Issues and Tensions among Lutherans in North America**

#### **The Walkout of 1974 and formation of Seminex.<sup>16</sup>**

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<sup>14</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_Association\\_of\\_Lutheran\\_Churches](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Association_of_Lutheran_Churches)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.elcic.ca/About-the-ELCIC/default.cfm>

<sup>16</sup> Kurt E Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion: A Theological Analysis of the Missouri Synod Conflict* (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977); John Tietjen, *Memoirs in Exile: Confessional Hope and Institutional Conflict* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1990); Mary Todd, *Authority Vested: A Story of Identity and Change in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000); Paul A Zimmerman., *A Seminary in Crisis: The Inside Story of the Preus Fact Finding Committee* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2007).

The 1970s became very turbulent years for the LCMS associated by in large with the events leading up to the walkout of faculty and students at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and the subsequent formation of Seminex, an institution continuing the education of Lutheran ministers from 1974 to 1987.

The events are in brief as follows: Throughout the 1960s a number of professors at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, based their biblical interpretation on the historical-critical methods—a teaching associated as liberal since it no longer took at face value what Scripture testified and thus undermined the authority and norm of Scripture.

The President of the LCMS, Jacob Preus established a Fact Finding Committee which began interviewing Concordia Seminary, St. Louis faculty members on December 11, 1970. The interviews were completed on March 6, 1971 and a report was prepared and presented to President Preus on June 15, 1971. Two weeks later Preus sent the total report to the seminary Board of Control and the seminary president, John Tietjen.<sup>17</sup> At the Milwaukee convention of 1971, the seminary's board of control was instructed "to take appropriate action on the basis of the report, commending or correcting where necessary. . . . That the Board of Control report progress directly to the President of Synod and the Board for Higher Education."<sup>18</sup>

The Board of Control cleared the faculty of the "false doctrine" charges in February 1973, commending each member as faithful to Scripture and the Lutheran confessions. However at the Missouri Synod's 1973 convention in New Orleans a new, more conservative seminary board of control was elected. This new board suspended Tietjen as president in August 1973. That suspension was repeated on January 20 of the following year.

The faculty majority were in support of John Teitjen and thus declared a moratorium for their classes which the majority of students honored. As a result, seminary classrooms were virtually empty. On February 17, 1974, the Board of Control declared that if the 45 members of the faculty majority failed to return to the classrooms by noon the next day with an intention to teach, their teaching contract with the seminary would be terminated, which consequently happened.

On the morning of February 19, a large majority of the seminary's students voted to continue their education under the terminated faculty at an off-campus site. After media attention and a lot of fanfare, these students left the campus and the next day, classes officially began at Concordia Seminary in Exile (Seminex). Seminex was first located at Eden Seminary and Saint Louis University. Since Seminex was not yet an accredited school, a deal was arranged with the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) whereby the first class of Seminex graduates would officially receive their diplomas from LSTC. John Tietjen, who in October 1974 was finally removed as president of Concordia Seminary, was elected president of Seminex in February 1975.

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<sup>17</sup> The report can be found in the appendix of *Seminary in Crisis*, CPH, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Resolution 2-28, Proceedings [1971], 122.

Within a year and a half of its inception, Seminex had acquired its own facilities, making its home in midtown St. Louis (now generally known as the Grand Center area): first at 607 North Grand Boulevard and then at 539 North Grand.

Within the LCMS a new organization from the liberal wing of the LCMS, the Evangelical Lutherans in Mission (ELIM), was formed to provide financial support to Seminex. Under the Preus administration this support from LCMS congregations was not condoned and eventually that led to the removal of four District presidents in 1976. During the Seminex controversy and these removals, approximately 250 congregations—about 100 000 members—left the Missouri Synod. These 250 congregations formed a new, independent church body, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC) in December 1976 (see above).

Since Seminex had only a small number of congregations to call its graduates as well as the difficulty in finding financial support, its enrollment gradually declined over the course of the late 1970s. As a result of the formation of the ELCA, Seminex finally dispersed its faculty and students were sent to the ELCA seminaries around the country, including the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC), Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, and Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, California. The last St. Louis commencement was held in May 1983, although Seminex continued to exist as an educational institution on the LSTC campus in Chicago through the end of 1987.<sup>19</sup>

### **Controversy over Ordination of same Sex Marriages and Gay blessings**

On August 21, 2009, at the ELCA's Assembly in Minneapolis the vote was passed to ordain gays and lesbians who are in a committed monogamous relationships and have them serve as official ministers. However, it remains up to the congregations to call a clergy person in a same sex relationship. That decision was not approved by partner churches such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) Fellowship in North America, which voted to declare disunity with the ELCA based on what it saw as a willful disobedience to the word of God that encourages marriage is only between a man and a woman.<sup>20</sup> In addition, a new Lutheran Church body, the North American Lutheran Church (NALC) was formed at Grove City, Ohio in August 2010. Behind that formation were the two conservative *Lutheran CORE* and *Word Alone* organizations in the ELCA. These two had opposed the vote and condemned it as an open rejection of scriptural authority. Bishop Paul Spring was elected as the first bishop of the NALC.

The creation of the NALC was also praised by representatives from the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC), an association of approximately 495

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<sup>19</sup> One may see the above from Kurt E Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion: A Theological Analysis of the Missouri Synod Conflict* (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977); Paul A Zimmerman, *A Seminary in Crisis: The Inside Story of the Preus Fact Finding Committee* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2007). <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seminex>

<sup>20</sup> See EECMY's official website: <http://www.eecmy.org/?page=!news&pagenr=2&article=39>.



congregations that have severed ties with the ELCA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.

For an understanding of the ELCA hermeneutic, please go to Sire page, 133, 139-143.