

***Comparative Christianity  
by  
Fr. William G. Brown  
via  
Zoom 5:30 – 6:30 pm***



***Lutheran Church***

*February 23, 2022*

## Explanation of the Great Seal of Lutheran Church

In a July 8, 1530, letter to Lazarus Spengler, Luther interprets his seal:

Grace and peace from the Lord. As you desire to know whether my painted seal, which you sent to me, has hit the mark, I shall answer most amiably and tell you my original thoughts and reason about why my seal is a symbol of my theology. The first should be a black cross in a heart, which retains its natural color, so that I myself would be reminded that faith in the Crucified saves us. "For one who believes from the heart will be justified" (Romans 10:10). Although it is indeed a black cross, which mortifies and which should also cause pain, it leaves the heart in its natural color. It does not corrupt nature, that is, it does not kill but keeps alive. "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17) but by faith in the crucified. Such a heart should stand in the middle of a white rose, to show that faith gives joy, comfort, and peace. In other words, it places the believer into a white, joyous rose, for this faith does not give peace and joy like the world gives (John 14:27). That is why the rose should be white and not red, for white is the color of the spirits and the angels (cf. Matthew 28:3; John 20:12). Such a rose should stand in a sky-blue field, symbolizing that such joy in spirit and faith is a beginning of the heavenly future joy, which begins already, but is grasped in hope, not yet revealed. And around this field is a golden ring, symbolizing that such blessedness in Heaven lasts forever and has no end. Such blessedness is exquisite, beyond all joy and goods, just as gold is the most valuable, most precious, and best metal. This is my compendium theologiae [summary of theology]. I have wanted to show it to you in good friendship, hoping for your appreciation. May Christ, our beloved Lord, be with your spirit until the life hereafter. Amen.

**Movie: A real MUST:** [Rick Steves' Luther and the Reformation - YouTube](#)

Lutheranism traces its interpretation of the Christian religion to the teachings of Martin Luther and the 16th-century movements that issued from his reforms. ... The self-designation of Luther's followers was "evangelical"—that is, centered on the Gospel.

**Lutheranism** is one of the largest branches of Protestantism that identifies with the theology of Martin Luther, a 16th-century German monk and reformer whose efforts to reform the theology and practice of the Roman Catholic Church launched the Protestant Reformation. The reaction of the government and church authorities to the international spread of his writings, beginning with the *Ninety-five Theses*, divided Western Christianity. During the Reformation, Lutheranism became the state religion of numerous states of northern Europe, especially in northern Germany, Scandinavia. Lutheran clergy became civil servants and the Lutheran churches became part of the state.

Luther makes **three main points** in his ninety-five theses. Here they are, in his own words:

## **1. Selling indulgences to finance the building of St. Peter's is wrong.**

"The revenues of all Christendom are being sucked into this insatiable basilica. The Germans laugh at calling this the common treasure of Christendom. Before long, all the churches, palaces, walls, and bridges of Rome will be built out of our money.

First of all, we should rear living temples, next local churches, and only last of all St. Peter's, which is not necessary for us. We Germans cannot attend St. Peter's. Better that it should never be built than that our parochial churches should be despoiled. ...

Why doesn't the pope build the basilica of St. Peter's out of his own money? He is richer than Croesus. He would do better to sell St. Peter's and give the money to the poor folk who are being fleeced by the hawkers of indulgences."



## **2. The pope has no power over Purgatory.**

"Papal indulgences do not remove guilt. Beware of those who say that indulgences effect reconciliation with God. ... He who is contrite has plenary remission of guilt and penalty without indulgences.

The pope can only remove those penalties which he himself has imposed on earth, for Christ did not say, 'Whatsoever I have bound in heaven you may loose on earth.'

Therefore I claim that the pope has no jurisdiction over Purgatory.

... If the pope does have power to release anyone from Purgatory, why in the name of love does he not abolish Purgatory by letting everyone out? If for the sake of miserable money he released uncounted souls, why should he not for the sake of most holy love empty the place?

To say that souls are liberated from Purgatory is audacious. To say they are released as soon as the coffer rings is to incite avarice. The pope would do better to give everything away without charge."

### **3. Buying indulgences gives people a false sense of security and endangers their salvation.**

"Indulgences are positively harmful to the recipient because they impede salvation by diverting charity and inducing a false sense of security. Christians should be taught that he who gives to the poor is better than he who receives a pardon.

He who spends money on indulgences instead of relieving want receives not the indulgence of the pope but the indignation of God. ...

Indulgences are most pernicious because they induce complacency and thereby imperil salvation. Those persons are damned who think that letters of indulgence make them certain of salvation.

God works by contraries so that a man feels himself to be lost in the very moment when he is on the point of being saved. ...Man must first cry out that there is no health in him. He must be consumed with horror. This is the pain of Purgatory. ...

In this disturbance salvation begins. When man believes himself to be utterly lost, light breaks. Peace comes in the word of Christ through faith. He who does not have this is lost even though he be absolved a million times by the pope, and he who does have it may not wish to be released from Purgatory, for true contrition seeks penalty. Christians should be encouraged to bear the cross."

<https://www.uncommon-travel-germany.com/95-theses.html>

Here are a couple of videos which I think are interesting. I have already forwarded these to you, so many of you might have already watched them. I think they will be helpful in understanding and getting a feel for Lutheranism.

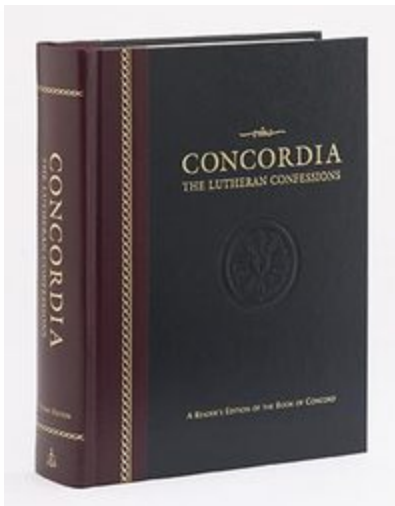
*Lutheran Church Service*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AlIfMEj-dBU>

An exceptionally good interview with a Lutheran Pastor  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99fmOmlcF0c>

## Book of Concord

The major beliefs of the Lutheran Church are contained in the *Book of Concord*.



## A Brief Introduction to the Book of Concord

The Book of Concord contains documents which Christians from the fourth to the 16th century A.D. explained what they believed and taught on the basis of the Holy Scriptures. It includes, first, the three creeds which originated in the ancient church, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. It contains, secondly, the Reformation writings known as the Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, Luther's Small and Large Catechisms, and the Formula of Concord.

The Catechisms and the Smalcald Articles came from the pen of Martin Luther; the Augsburg Confession, its Apology, and the Treatise were written by Luther's co-worker, the scholarly Phillip Melancthon; the Formula of Concord was given its final form chiefly by Jacob Andreae, Martin Chemnitz, and Nickolaus Selnecker.

The parts of the Book of Concord:

**I. The Creeds** (Apostles, Nicene, Athanasian)

**II. The Lutheran Confessions**

“Among the Lutheran Confessions the two catechisms of Dr. Martin Luther are the earliest. Luther published them in the spring of 1529 to help Pastors and parents give instruction in the chief parts of Christian doctrine.

The Augsburg Confession was written by Melanchthon in 1530. Emperor Charles V had invited the Lutheran princes and theologians to attend a meeting of government leaders at Augsburg. He wanted to discuss how the religious controversy in his empire could be settled, so that German Lutheran princes would join the imperial forces to keep the Turks out of Europe. The Augsburg Confession is composed of several documents which already existed but which were combined by Melanchthon to give a clear but conciliatory summary of the teachings and practices of the Lutheran pastors and congregations. It is to this day the basic Lutheran confession.

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession was published in 1531. After the Augsburg Confession had been read to the emperor, a committee of Roman catholic theologians prepared a reply called the confutation. The Apology defends the Augsburg Confession against the accusations of the Confutation.

The Smalcald Articles were written by Luther in late 1536. On June 4, 1536, Pope Paul III announced that a council would be held in Mantua beginning May 8, 1537, to deal with the concerns of the Protestants. The elector (or prince) of Saxony requested Luther to prepare some articles for discussion at the council. Luther indicated on which points Lutherans would stand fast and on which points a compromise might be possible. These articles were never used for their intended purpose, but Lutherans at once recognized their value as a statement of pure evangelical doctrine, and they were therefore included in The Book of Concord.

The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope was prepared by Melanchthon at the Protestant meeting at Smalcald in 1537 where Luther's articles were to be discussed but, partly because Luther became ill, were never publicly presented to the assembly. Instead Melanchthon was requested to prepare a treatise which actually is an appendix to the Augsburg Confession.

The Formula of Concord was written a generation after Luther's death. Serious controversies had arisen among theologians of the Augsburg Confession which threatened the very life of the Reformation. The Formula of Concord deals with these dissensions and presents the sound Biblical doctrine on the disputed issues.

No doubt much will – and should – be made of The Book of Concord as we observe its 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary. But the most worthy and God-pleasing way for Lutherans of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to commemorate the publication of The Book of Concord would be to engage in earnest study of the precious Confessions it contains and to commit themselves anew to the glorious truths of God’s Word which they teach.

A professor a generation ago described the significance of the confessional writings perhaps best of all. Prof. William Arndt wrote in the Concordia Theological Monthly:

The Confessions are the brightest jewel in the crown of the Lutheran Church. In speaking of our Confessions we dwell on facts that should make the heart of every Lutheran swell with joy and thanksgiving. We look here on one of the brightest pages of our history as a church. It is true, I admit, that the laurels of our fathers must not become the soft bed of the children on which they repose in sweet indolence, and it may be that there is somebody who speaks about the achievements of his ancestors to such an extent that he entirely forgets about the plowing, harvesting, and threshing which he himself ought to do. But my plea is that we do not become so occupied with our daily tasks in the churches that we forget the magnificent treasures which are furnished us in our Confessions. To study them, to read them frequently, to ponder their content, is like traveling, in a mountain country where the air is pure, the brooks sparkle, the birds sing their most beautiful songs, and the clatter of the noisy streets cannot disturb and intrude.”

### Contents of the Book of Concord

<b>Name</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Summary</b>
Apostles' Creed	2nd Cent. A.D.	Unknown	Baptismal Creed used in Rome.
Nicene Creed	325, 381 A.D.	Assembled church leaders at the Council of Nicea (325) and the Council of Constantinople .	This Creed intends to clearly state on the basis of Scripture that Jesus Christ is true God equal with the Father and that the Holy Spirit is also true God, equal with the Father and the Son.

Athanasian Creed	6th-8th Century A.D.	Unknown. Named after the great church father Athanasius, who was instrumental in the drafting of the Nicene Creed.	Confesses the teaching of the Trinity and the Person and work of Jesus Christ.
Small Catechism	1529	Martin Luther	A short work that was to educate the laity in the fundamentals of the Christian Faith.
Large Catechism	1529	Martin Luther	Though covering the same chief parts of Christian doctrine as the Small Catechism, the Large Catechism is really a series of re-edited sermons that Luther preached.
Augsburg Confession	6/25, 1530	Philip Melanchthon	Often viewed as the chief Lutheran Confession; it was presented by the Lutherans to Emperor Charles V at the imperial diet of Augsburg as a statement of the chief articles of the Christian faith as understood by Lutherans; also contained here is a listing of abuses that the Lutherans had corrected.
Apology of the Augsburg Confession	1531	Philip Melanchthon	After the Roman theologians had condemned many of the



			<p>teachings of the Augsburg Confession (AC), Melanchthon authored this lengthy defense of AC. Rightly considered a Christian classic.</p>
Smalcald Articles	1536	Martin Luther	<p>Articles of faith intended by Luther to be an ecumenical platform for an upcoming ecumenical council. Stated what the Lutherans could not compromise and why.</p>
Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope	1537	Philip Melanchthon	<p>Was intended to serve as a supplement to the Augsburg Confession, giving the Lutheran position on the Pope.</p>
Formula of Concord	1577	Jacob Andreae, Martin Chemnitz, David Chytraeus	<p>A restatement of some teachings in the Augsburg Confession over which Lutherans had become divided. The <i>Solid Declaration</i> is the unabridged version. The <i>Epitome</i> is an abridged version intended for congregations to study. Over 8,100 pastors and theologians signed it, as well as over 50 government leaders.</p>

<https://bookofconcord.org/>



Here are some of the major items about Lutheran belief contained in the Book of Concord. Even though Lutherans might belong to different synods, nevertheless they all profess according to the Book of Concord.

## LUTHERAN BELIEFS

- The bible is the ultimate authority
- Praying to saints is idolatry
- Salvation comes from "faith alone"
- Baptism and the Lord's Supper
- Bible should be available in all languages

The divide centered primarily on two points: the proper source of authority in the church, often called the *formal principle* of the Reformation, and the doctrine of justification, often called the *material principle* of Lutheran theology. Lutheranism advocates a doctrine of justification "by Grace alone through faith alone on the basis of Scripture alone", the doctrine that scripture is the final authority on all matters of faith. This contrasts with the belief of the Roman Catholic Church, defined at the Council of Trent (1545 - Feb.2, 1563), concerning authority coming from both the Scriptures and Tradition.

Unlike Calvinism, Lutherans retain many of the liturgical practices and sacramental teachings of the pre-Reformation Western Church, with a particular

emphasis on the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper, though Eastern Lutheranism uses the Byzantine Rite.<sup>[5]</sup> Lutheran theology differs from Reformed theology in Christology, divine grace, the purpose of God's Law, the concept of perseverance of the saints, and [predestination](#).

Lutherans hold that sacraments are sacred acts of divine institution. Whenever they are properly administered by the use of the physical component commanded by God along with the divine words of institution, God is, in a way specific to each sacrament, present with the Word and physical component. He earnestly offers to all who receive the sacrament forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. He also works in the recipients to get them to accept these blessings and to increase the assurance of their possession.

Lutherans are not dogmatic about the number of the sacraments. In line with Luther's initial statement in his Large Catechism some speak of only two sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion, although later in the same work he calls Confession and Absolution "the third sacrament". The definition of sacrament in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* lists Absolution as one of them. With the exception of Laestadian Lutherans, Private Confession is not practiced among Lutherans as often as in the Catholic Church. Rather, it is expected before receiving the Eucharist for the first time. Some churches also allow for individual absolution on Saturdays before the Eucharistic service. A general confession and absolution (known as the Penitential Rite) is proclaimed in the Eucharistic liturgy.

## ***Eucharist***

### [Eucharist in the Lutheran Church](#)



Luther communing John the Steadfast

Lutherans hold that within the Eucharist, also referred to as the Sacrament of the Altar or the Lord's Supper, the true body and blood of Christ are truly present "in, with, and under the forms" of the consecrated bread and wine for all those who eat and drink it, a doctrine that the *Formula of Concord* calls the sacramental union.

Lutherans believe that the Body and Blood of Christ are "truly and substantially present in, with and under the forms" of consecrated bread and wine (the elements), so that communicants eat and drink both the elements and the true Body and Blood

of Christ himself in the Sacrament of the Eucharist whether they are believers or unbelievers. The Lutheran doctrine of the Real Presence is also known as "the Sacramental union. This theology was first formally and publicly confessed in the Wittenberg Concord. It has been called "consubstantiation", but most Lutheran theologians reject the use of this term, as it creates confusion with an earlier doctrine of the same name. Some Lutherans do believe in consubstantiation. Lutherans use the term "in, with and under the forms of consecrated bread and wine" and "sacramental union" to distinguish their understanding of the Eucharist from those of the Reformed and other traditions.

#### Use of the sacrament

For Lutherans, the Eucharist is not considered to be a valid sacrament unless the elements are used according to Christ's mandate and institution (consecration, distribution, and reception). This was first formulated in the Wittenberg Concord of 1536 in the formula: *Nihil habet rationem sacramenti extra usum a Christo institutum* ("Nothing has the character of a sacrament apart from the use instituted by Christ").<sup>[1]</sup> Some Lutherans oppose the reservation of the consecrated elements, private masses, and the practice of Corpus Christi. The consecrated elements are treated with respect and in some areas are reserved as in Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Anglican practice. Eucharistic adoration is typically practiced from the consecration and elevation to reception. To remove any scruple of doubt or superstition the *reliquæ* traditionally are either consumed or poured into the earth. In Lutheran congregations, the administration of private communion of the sick and "shut-in" (those too feeble to attend services) involves a completely separate service of the Eucharist for which the sacramental elements are consecrated by the celebrant.

Weddings and funerals also typically include the celebration of the Eucharist in Lutheran churches. At all ordinations of pastors and the consecration of bishops the Eucharist is offered.

#### **Confession**

Many Lutherans receive the sacrament of penance before receiving the Eucharist. Prior to going to Confession and receiving Absolution, the faithful are expected to examine their lives in light of the Ten Commandments. An order of Confession and Absolution is contained in the Small Catechism, as well as in liturgical books. Lutherans typically kneel at the communion rails to confess their sins, while the confessor listens and then offers absolution while laying their stole on the penitent's head.<sup>[118]</sup> Clergy are prohibited from revealing anything said during private Confession and Absolution per the Seal of the Confessional, and face excommunication if it is violated.

#### **Baptism**

Lutherans practice infant baptism.

Lutherans hold that Baptism is a saving work of God, mandated and instituted by Jesus Christ. Baptism is a "means of grace" through which God creates and strengthens "saving faith" as the "washing of regeneration" in which infants and adults are reborn. Since the creation of faith is exclusively God's work, it does not depend on the actions of the one baptized, whether infant or adult. Even though baptized infants cannot articulate that faith, Lutherans believe that it is present all the same.<sup>1</sup>

It is faith alone that receives these divine gifts, so Lutherans confess that baptism "works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare". Lutherans hold fast to the Scripture cited in 1 Peter 3:21, "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Therefore, Lutherans administer Baptism to both infants and adults. In the special section on infant baptism in his *Large Catechism*, Luther argues that infant baptism is God-pleasing because persons so baptized were reborn and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

According to Lutheranism, the central final hope of the Christian is "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting" as confessed in the *Apostles' Creed* rather than [predestination](#). Lutherans disagree with those who make predestination—rather than Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection—the source of salvation. Unlike some Calvinists, Lutherans do not believe in a predestination to damnation, usually referencing "God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" as contrary evidence to such a claim. Instead, Lutherans teach eternal damnation is a result of the unbeliever's sins, rejection of the forgiveness of sins, and unbelief.

### **Judgment and eternal life**

Lutherans do not believe in any sort of earthly millennial kingdom of Christ either before or after his second coming on the last day. Lutherans teach that, at death, the souls of Christians are immediately taken into the presence of Jesus, where they await the second coming of Jesus on the last day. On the last day, all the bodies of the dead will be resurrected.

Their souls will then be reunited with the same bodies they had before dying. The bodies will then be changed, those of the wicked to a state of everlasting shame and torment, those of the righteous to an everlasting state of celestial glory. After the resurrection of all the dead, and the change of those still living, all nations shall be gathered before Christ, and he will separate the righteous from the wicked.

Christ will publicly judge all people by the testimony of their deeds, the good works of the righteous in evidence of their faith, and the evil works of the wicked in evidence of their unbelief. He will judge in righteousness in the presence of all people and angels, and his final judgment will be just damnation to everlasting punishment for the wicked and a gracious gift of life everlasting to the righteous.

[Lutheranism - Wikipedia](#)

## Divisions within Lutheranism in USA



"In the end, we are all Lutherans. Every Lutheran abides by the Book of Concord, which has the basic teachings of the Lutheran Church. These teachings are mainly Luther's Small Catechism and Luther's Large Catechism."

### 6 Major Divisions

These divisions are all based on different theological viewpoints such as, ordination of women, same sex marriages, various methods of scripture interpretation, sexuality, etc.

#### **AFLC**

The **Association of Free Lutheran Congregations** (AFLC) was formed in 1962 and is the fourth largest of all the American Lutheran bodies. The churches that formed the AFLC were members of the Lutheran Free Church who did not wish to join the American Lutheran Church (ALC). The AFLC has more than 230 congregations currently. Website: <https://www.aflc.org/>

#### **AALC**

The **AALC** were formerly churches of the **American Lutheran Church** (ALC) and formed in 1987 due to the ELCA merger. These churches did not want to join the ELCA. AALC Lutherans believe:

- The full authority of the Bible as the inerrant and infallible Word of God;
- The Lutheran Confessions as a true interpretation of Scripture;
- A purpose focused on the Great Commission with priority for Evangelism and World Missions;
- The authority of the local congregation as the basic unit of the church.

Website: <https://www.taalc.org/>

## **ELS**

The **ELS** is another smaller Lutheran body and is very conservative. This church has about 21,000 members and was originally known as the "Norwegian Synod". The ELS is in full fellowship with the WELS.

Website: <http://www.evangelicallutheransynod.org/>

**In the end, we are all Lutherans. Every Lutheran abides by the Book of Concord, which has the basic teachings of the Lutheran Church. These teachings are mainly Luther's Small Catechism and Luther's Large Catechism.**

[What makes Lutherans different from other Lutherans? \(tripod.com\)](http://tripod.com)

## **ELCA**

The **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)** is a [mainline Protestant Lutheran church](#) headquartered in [Chicago, Illinois](#). The ELCA was officially formed on January 1, 1988, by the merging of three Lutheran church bodies. As of 2020, it has approximately 3.14 million baptized members in 8,894 congregations. In 2015, [Pew Research](#) estimated that 1.4 percent of the U.S. population self-identifies with the ELCA.<sup>[6]</sup> It is the seventh-largest Christian denomination by reported membership,<sup>[7]</sup> and the largest [Lutheran](#) denomination in the [United States](#).<sup>[8]</sup> The next two largest Lutheran denominations are the [Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod](#) (LCMS) (with over 1.8 million members<sup>[9]</sup>) and the [Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod](#) (WELS) (with approximately 350,000 members).<sup>[10]</sup> There are also many [smaller Lutheran church bodies](#) in the [United States](#), some of which were formed by dissidents to the major 1988 merger.

The ELCA belongs to the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, and the Lutheran World Federation. The ELCA is in full communion with the Episcopal Church, Moravian Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in America, United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical\\_Lutheran\\_Church\\_in\\_America](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Lutheran_Church_in_America)

## **LCMS**

The **Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS)**, also known as the **Missouri Synod**,<sup>[3]</sup> is a traditional, [confessional Lutheran denomination](#) in the [United States](#). With over 1.8 million members,<sup>[4]</sup> it is the second-largest [Lutheran](#) body in the United States. The LCMS was organized in 1847 at a meeting in [Chicago, Illinois](#), as the **German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States** ([German](#): *Die Deutsche Evangelisch-Lutherische Synode von Missouri, Ohio und andern Staaten*), a name which partially reflected the geographic locations of the founding congregations.

The LCMS has congregations in all 50 U.S. states and two Canadian provinces, but over half of its members are located in the [Midwest](#). It is a member of the [International Lutheran Council](#) and is in [altar and pulpit fellowship](#) with most of that group's members.<sup>[5]</sup> The LCMS is headquartered in [Kirkwood, Missouri](#), and is divided into 35 [districts](#)—33 of which are geographic and two (the [English](#) and the [SELC](#)) non-geographic. The current president is [Matthew C. Harrison](#), who took office on September 1, 2010

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lutheran\\_Church%E2%80%93Missouri\\_Synod](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lutheran_Church%E2%80%93Missouri_Synod)



## WELS

The **Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS)**, also referred to simply as the **Wisconsin Synod**, is an American Confessional Lutheran denomination of Christianity. Characterized as theologically conservative, it was founded in 1850 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

As of 2021, it had a baptized membership of 344,244 in 1,264 congregations, with churches in 47 US states and 4 provinces of Canada.<sup>[1]</sup> The WELS also does gospel outreach in 40 countries around the world.<sup>[2]</sup> It is the third largest Lutheran denomination in the United States. The WELS school system is the fourth largest private school system in the United States.<sup>[3]</sup>

The WELS is in fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) and is a member of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC), a worldwide organization of Lutheran church bodies of the same beliefs. <https://celc.info/membership/member-churches/wisconsin-evangelical-lutheran-synod/>

