

# Association of Confessing Evangelical Lutheran Congregations Definition of Confessional Lutheranism In Light of Present Day Issues

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*(The following is intended for discussion purposes in the hope of bringing about meaningful dialogue and healing within the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. It is not intended to be an exhaustive definition of Confessional Lutheranism, but to address those specific issues which have become matters of contention among us. Additionally, the term “Confessional” has been misused as a pejorative or caricature of otherwise faithful Lutheran pastors and laymen, and this document seeks to correct the unfortunate use of an honorable description applied to honorable people in a dishonorable way. To be sure, a more complete understanding of Confessional Lutheranism is found in the Book of Concord, 1580. Additionally, it is acknowledged that it is a life-long desire to believe, teach, confess and live as Confessional Lutherans and that such a goal is never fully achieved in this life but is constantly the object of our striving. Finally, this definition is provided to the Church and Synod in order to lift up the blessed Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation He brings to fallen, sinful mankind. This document is offered in a spirit of Christian unity and peace among Lutherans so that with united voice we may, “...stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the Gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.” Philippians 1:27-28b.)*

Confessional Lutheranism holds fervently to the Holy Scriptures as the written, inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God in all things they address and embraces a *quia* (“because” the Confessions are a correct exposition of the teachings of Scripture, not *quatenus* – that is only “in so far as” the Confessions are in accord with Scripture) subscription to the Lutheran Symbols or Confessions as contained in the Book of Concord of 1580.

This faith is marked by pastors and laymen who:

1. In accord with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, hold that the marks of the Church are:
  - a. The Word of God taught in all its truth and purity.
  - b. The Sacraments administered in accord with Christ's institution.

Where these marks are seen, there Christians will find the True Visible Church on Earth. These marks are visible precisely so that Christians will know what Church to join, and so that blood-bought souls may have the certainty of salvation.

(Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:27; John 20:31; I John 1:3-4; John 20:23; John 3:4-15; Romans 8:10; Romans 10:17; Acts 2:38-39, Acts 22:16; Luke 22:19-20; Matthew 26:26-28, A.C. V; A.C. XIII; S.D. II, 50, 53; A.P. XIII.)

2. In accord with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, hold with the Augsburg Confession:

“Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works. People are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in his sight.” (Augsburg Confession Article IV-Justification, Dau/Bente)

Since the doctrine of justification is the central doctrine of the Christian faith, any equivocation or error in any doctrine of the faith weakens and obfuscates this central article on which the Church stands or falls. Therefore, it is contended such equivocation respecting the following articles of the faith is a direct attack on the central doctrine and is detrimental to Christian souls and to the faith we believe, teach, and confess.

(Romans 1:16-17; 3:19-27; 4:3-5; Galatians 1:6-7, 15-16; Ephesians 2:8-10; Hebrews 9:25-28) (Augsburg Confession, IV; Apology IV, 2, 5, 53-56; Smalcald Articles Part II, Article I – The Chief Article, 5; Formula of Concord Epitome, Article III, 10; Formula of Concord Solid Declaration, Article III, 6-17)

3. In accord with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, hold that there is one divinely instituted, divinely mandated pastoral office in the Church and that this office is not occupied by every member of the congregation but by those men well prepared for it and properly called to it. Therefore, any public proclamation of God's Word in worship should and ought to be done only by such pastors called to the task. We reject as unbiblical the post-Christian trend in some denominations to allow homosexual and female clergy. Confessional Lutherans affirm the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and encourage Christians to practice this priesthood in their homes and vocations but it is not to be confused with the office of pastor in the Church.

(Matthew 16:18-19; Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; SA X 1-3) (AC XIV; AP XIII, 11-13)

4. In accord with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, hold that God has established definite and clearly distinctive roles for men and women in the Church and in the home. It is in accord with the biblical Order of Creation that women not exercise authority over men. Therefore, confessional Lutherans hold that women should not serve as pastors, elders, congregational presidents, or vice presidents, since such positions require the exercise of authority over men within the congregation. Additionally, women should not participate in the public proclamation of God's Word (e.g., reading the lessons in worship), nor in the administration of the Sacraments (distributing the

elements). In order to bring all practice in our congregations into conformity with the biblical Order of Creation, this subject needs a thorough re-examination and application to the life of the Church.

(Genesis 2:18-25; Genesis 3:6, 16-17; I Corinthians 11:3-15; I Corinthians 14:33-34; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18; I Timothy 2:11-13; Titus 2:3-5; I Peter 3:1, 5)

5. In accord with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, retain, honor, and will not dispense with the liturgical worship of the Church and will resist any attempt to conform the worship of the Church to the expectations of the world. This is done so that the unity of the faith and of the Triune God is expressed through the unity of our worship and the faith it conveys.

(Genesis 13:18; Exodus 12; Exodus 25:9; Exodus 28:1-2; Exodus 40; II Samuel 24:25; I Kings 8:22-66; II Chronicles 29:27-30; Luke 4:15; Acts 14:1; I Corinthians 14:26-33; Hebrews 10:24-25; Revelation 4; Revelation 5; Revelation 7:9-12; Revelation 15:2-4; Revelation 19:1-8; AC Article X, 1-2; AC Article XXIV, 5; AP XV:4; AP XXIV:1; AC XXIV:40; AC XXIV:34; LC I:94; AP XV: 20-21; AP VII/VIII:33; AP XXIV:99; AC, epilogue to XXI, 4,5)

6. In accord with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, insist on the retention of closed communion in the Divine Service. This is done to express proper Christian love and pastoral care for those coming to the altar and to preserve the purity of the faith in all its articles, which is confessed at our altar by those who are present to receive the Lord's Supper.

(I Cor 10:14-22; 11:18-19; 11:26-29) (AC XXIV, 9, 35-36; AP VII, VIII,5.; LC V, 2, 57; Luther: SL 17, 2016; SL 10, 2247 f.; LW 38, 304)

7. In accord with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, trust in God's appointed means of grace to accomplish all that He promises (Is. 55:11). Accordingly, we joyously proclaim the Gospel of Christ to all people everywhere. We acknowledge that through His Word and Sacraments, God will call to faith those He chooses to call to faith and will save those He chooses to save. Moreover, we acknowledge that the Word and Sacraments are God's only means of grace. Therefore, our efforts or techniques have no power to cause salvation or enhance the likelihood of conversion. Such conversion is effected by the power of the Spirit through the Word according to God's gracious choice. Thus, while honored to serve as God's instruments to bestow His grace, we also recognize that our efforts do not determine the number of the elect and we believe in our Lord's promise that none of His elect will be lost. God may or may not grant numerical growth to His Church at any given time or place. Indeed, we understand that in these latter days the world will look upon the Church of Christ as despised, beaten down and defeated. Therefore, the success of the Church and her pastors is not to be judged by earthly models of "success" and "efficiency," reflected by the numbers of people who attend their congregations, but by the faithfulness of their teaching and preaching.

(Matthew 13:1-23; Matthew 23:37; John 6:65-66; John 16:18-25; Ephesians 1:19; I Corinthians 2:14; II Corinthians 4:6; Acts 7:51; John 3:16; John 6:37; I Timothy 2:4; Matthew 25:34, 41; Romans 9:22; Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:4-6; Matthew 24:22, 24, 31; Romans 8:30; Roman 11:33; Luke 24:47; II Thessalonians 2:13; Mark 4:1-20; Matthew 28:19-20; II Corinthians 4:13; Matthew 10:32-33; I John 1:9) (LC Part I, 42; EP I, 6; Luther SL12, 437; FC SD XI 68-69; FC SD XI 80; FC Ep XI 19; FC Ep XI 5; FC SD XI 43-44; FC SD XI 14, 22-23; FC SD XI 25; FC SD XI 33; FC SD XI 40; FC SD XI 28-29, 34-35; FC SD XI 38-39; FC SD XI 54; FC SD XI 76; FC SD XI 95-96)

8. In accord with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, hold that the purpose and work of the Church is the right teaching of God's Word and the right administration of the Sacraments, thus proclaiming in word and deed the one true faith. This right teaching and administration of the Sacraments equips God's people to proclaim the Gospel in their divine vocations, thus keeping Christ's command to "Go and make disciples." Making disciples is the result of God's work and not the result of human desire, passion, or effort.

(Isaiah 55:11; Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:42; Acts 5:42; Romans 10:14-17; Romans 13:8-10; II Corinthians 8:3-4; Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:18-4:1) (AC XX, 1-2, 28-29; AC XXVII, 49-50)

9. In accord with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, hold that any and all heterodox teaching can only divide Christ's Church, cast doubt on the assurance of our salvation, and point us to something or someone other than Christ for that assurance. There is no benefit to the Body of Christ in the consideration of falsehood (other than that it may be recognized for what it is as is done in the antitheses of the Confessions). It is wrong for Lutheran pastors to join with clergy of non-Lutheran church bodies or with false religions in any form of public worship (unionism and syncretism) regardless of who sponsors such worship or whether or not the event is termed a "civic event". Neither will Confessional Lutherans join in such worship settings in response to any "once in a lifetime" event.

(Deuteronomy 13:3-5; John 17:20-26; Romans 16:17; I Corinthians 1:10, 11:19; II Corinthians 6:14-18; II Corinthians 11:13-15; Galatians 1:6-8; I Timothy 6:3-5; II Peter 2:1-3; I John 1, 5-6; II John 7-11; Jude 3-4.) (Pref. to AC, 4; AC XXVIII, 1-13; AP IV, 33-35; AP VII, 48; TR 58-59; SD RN 14-20; EP XII, 2; SD VII, 96; SD X, 5; SD X, 10; SD X, 16; SD XI, 95-96, SD XII, 7-9, 28, 36, 37, 39)