

# **WHY LCMS?**

(DIFFERENCES WITH OTHER DENOMINATIONS)

## **Differences compared to the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church America)**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Differences compared to Baptist Churches**

Unlike the LCMS, Baptist churches do not require subscription to a creedal statement or "body of doctrine" as such. However, one of the major doctrinal differences has to do with what the Bible teaches about Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Lutherans regard Baptism and the Lord's Supper as divinely instituted sacraments. Our confessional writings describe them as the Gospel in "visible" form. They are, therefore, at the heart and center of the Lutheran faith.

Baptist churches do not regard Baptism as a means of grace through which the Holy Spirit works to create and strengthen faith. Therefore, they reject infant Baptism. They also place great emphasis on the mode of Baptism (immersion required).

Likewise, the Lord's Supper is generally regarded by Baptists as merely a commemorative meal, not a sacrament in which the body and blood of Christ is truly present in and with the bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins.

Baptist churches also typically stress the role of "free will" in conversion, and (accordingly) speak of faith in Christ as being attained through a person's "choice" or "decision."

Lutherans, on the other hand, believe that faith itself is a gift of God's grace and is brought about not by the "free will" of human beings but by the power of God's Spirit working through God's means of grace, the Word and Sacraments.

## **Differences compared to the Episcopal Church**

While there are a number of significant theological differences between the LCMS and the Episcopal Church (e.g., the issue of authority in the church, especially as it relates to the doctrine of Scripture as the inspired and inerrant Word of God; the nature of the sacraments as means of grace; the precise understanding of the doctrine of justification; the question of what it means to be a "confessional" church), perhaps the most obvious difference has to do with the Episcopalian view of apostolic succession (which pertains equally to more "conservative" offshoots from the Episcopal church).

This difference is summarized as follows in Lewis Spitz's booklet "Our Church and Others":

“Episcopalians attach great importance to the theory of the apostolic succession. They insist that the apostles ordained bishops, these in turn ordained their successors, and so down through the centuries, so that the present-day bishops are the successors of the apostles through an unbroken chain.”

Scripture knows nothing of such a theory. Episcopalians hold that only bishops who have received their authority in this way can properly ordain ministers and that without such Episcopal ordination a minister cannot validly perform the sacraments.

## **Differences compared to the Methodist Church**

This is a difficult question to answer in the abstract, for a few reasons:

1. There are dozens of denominations of "Methodist" background and character which differ greatly from each other in theology and practice, from "holiness" churches to "Pentecostal" churches to "mainline" Methodist churches;
2. Even Methodist churches of the same denomination often differ to some degree in their theology and practice, since Methodist churches, as a rule, tend to be more concerned with "deeds" than "creeds."

Therefore, one might say the most fundamental difference between Lutheran and many Methodist churches is that the Lutheran church is a confessional church (i.e., it binds itself and its member congregations to a specific, formal confession of faith) while the Methodist church, in its varied forms, tends not be as concerned with formal "confessions" of faith to which its congregations must subscribe.

The primary differences between Lutheranism and "classical" Methodism rooted in the theology of John Wesley center in Wesley's doctrine of salvation.

Wesley taught, contrary to Lutheran theology, that 1) man is free not only to reject salvation but also to accept it (free salvation) by an act of human will; 2) all people who are obedient to the Gospel according to the measure of knowledge given them will be saved (universal salvation); 3) the Holy Spirit assures man of his salvation directly, through an inner "experience" (sure salvation); 4) Christians in this life are capable of Christian perfection and are commanded by God to pursue it (full salvation).

Wesley also held to a "symbolic" view of the sacraments in contrast to the Lutheran view of the sacraments as real and powerful means of grace.

## **Differences compared to the Catholic Church**

At the risk of oversimplification, and keeping in mind that individual Lutheran (and Catholic) theologians would undoubtedly disagree about the success of recent Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues in lessening or even "resolving" historic doctrinal differences between these two churches, listed below are what the LCMS would regard as some of the major theological differences between the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church:

### **1. The authority of Scripture.**

Lutherans believe Scripture alone has authority to determine doctrine; the Roman Catholic Church gives this authority also to the pope, the church, and certain traditions of the church.

## **2. The doctrine of justification.**

Lutherans believe a person is saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The Roman Catholic Church, while at times using similar language, still officially holds that faith, in order to save, must be accompanied by (or "infused with") some "work" or "love" active within a Christian.

## **3. The authority of the pope.**

Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, Lutherans do not believe the office of the papacy as such has any divine authority or that Christians need to submit to the Pope's authority to be "true" members of the visible church.

## **4. Differences remain about both the number and the nature of the sacraments.**

Roman Catholics speak of seven Sacraments while Lutherans tend to speak of only two (or three). More important than the number is how the Sacraments are understood.

To take a single example, Lutherans believe that in the Sacrament of the Altar (Communion) Christ's body and blood are truly present in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, but they do not accept the Roman Catholic doctrine of *transubstantiation*, which teaches that the elements are permanently changed from the substances of bread and wine to the substances of body and blood.

Transubstantiation is rejected for several reasons: It is a philosophical explanation for a work of Christ's almighty Word which we can only believe, not explain. In seeking to explain a mystery it changes the plain and simple meanings of God's Word (Scripture refers to the elements as *both* bread and wine *and* body and blood, 1 Cor. 11:26-27).

Transubstantiation leads to the assertion that the body and blood of Christ remain present "even apart from the administration of the Supper" and so encourages veneration of the elements apart from their sacramental use and detracts from the use Christ commands: "Take eat ... drink ... for the forgiveness of your sins." Lutheran rejection of transubstantiation should not in any way be taken to mean a denial that Christ's very body and blood are truly present in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of sins.

## **5. Differences remain about the role of Mary and the saints.**

Unlike Catholics, Lutherans do not believe it is proper or scriptural to offer prayers to saints or to view Mary as in any sense a "mediator" between God and human beings.

While Lutherans believe any doctrinal error has the potential to distort or deny Scripture's teaching regarding salvation, we also believe that anyone (regardless of denominational affiliation) who truly believes in Jesus Christ as Savior will be saved.

## **Differences compared to Pentecostal Churches**

Perhaps the main difference between The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and Pentecostal churches is that Pentecostal churches tend to emphasize the importance of personal and spiritual "experiences" (such as "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" and speaking in tongues), while the LCMS emphasizes the importance and centrality of the word and promises of God in Holy Scripture, which remain true and valid regardless of our personal "feelings" or "experiences."

*Taken from: <https://faith-lutheran-church.com/why-lcms%3F/>*