

---

# We Believe Teach and Confess

A concise doctrinal statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod





Dear Friend,

This booklet contains a summary statement of the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod which have as their basis the Word of God. People often ask, "What does your church teach?" We have therefore prepared this summary entitled "We Believe, Teach and Confess."

If we look around in this world we will see much that is violent, cruel, sinful and contrary to God's will. Television portrays it before us constantly. The newspapers cry out every day. Surely this is a fallen, sinful world worthy of nothing by God's wrath. We then look into our own hearts and see that we also are guilty of sins against God in thought, word and deed.

But, thanks to God, there is good news! The Bible tells us that God still loves the world; He does not want anyone to perish. Therefore He has provided a way to escape from the just punishment of our sins. In His love and grace He sent His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ into the world to be our Savior. He lived a perfect life and then died on the cross of Calvary to pay the penalty for our transgressions. By faith in Him we now have the forgiveness of all our sins and the sure hope of eternal life when we leave this world.

We urge you to read and study this booklet which will tell you more about what a wonderful God we have and what He has done for us. We invite you to give the booklet to a friend or acquaintance whom you may want to lead into further study of God's Word.

The booklet also contains brief information about the history and activity of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

The Doctrine Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

*This doctrinal statement was adopted in June, 1992. It is not intended to replace the Book of Concord or even one of the confessions therein, nor is it to be understood as constituting a thorough presentation of our beliefs and practices; rather, it is to serve as an up-to-date statement that can quickly inform interested persons of the Scriptural and confessional position of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod on important matters.*

# 1. God and His Word

We confess that the only true God is the Triune God, revealed in Scripture as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There is only one Divine Essence, yet there are three eternal Persons in that one Essence. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is a profound mystery which we cannot fully understand, but we accept it in humble faith because it is clearly taught in Scripture. For this reason “we worship one God in three persons and three Persons in one God,” as we confess in the Athanasian Creed. Although there are many in the world who claim to follow and worship a “supreme being,” only those who believe in the Triune God -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- can be saved. See Deut. 6:4, John 10:30, Matt. 28:19, Acts 20:28, Rom. 8:9, 2 Cor. 13:14, I Pet. 1:2, Col. 2:8-9, John 5:23.

We confess that God reveals Himself to mankind, not only through creation and the human conscience, but also and especially through the Holy Scriptures, His written Word. The true way of salvation is revealed only through God’s Word, and any claims for revelation of the way of salvation through other means must be rejected. The main purpose of Holy Scripture is to reveal to us that Jesus Christ is our only Savior. See Rom. 15:4 and 16:25-26, 2 Tim. 3:15, Luke 24:25-27, John 20:31, Rom. 10:14-17, Jer. 23:25-29, John 14:6, Acts 4:12.

We confess that the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, in their original form as written by the prophets, apostles, and evangelists, were given by inspiration of God. The Holy Scriptures are without error in everything they teach, including matters of geography, science, and history, and they are the only infallible rule and norm of Christian doctrine and practice. The Scriptures not only *contain* the Word of God (as if to say, some of their teachings are the authoritative Word of God and others are not), but they *are* the very Word of God *in their entirety*. We reject the so-called “historical-critical” or “higher-critical” method of Biblical interpretation as an unwarranted and arbitrary manner of dealing with Holy Scripture. The Scriptures are true and reliable in all that they report, including their accounts of Old Testament and New Testament miracles. We therefore regard the denial of these miracles as blasphemous and as setting up man’s reason as a judge over God’s Word. Since the term “inspired” is often used in a loose sense, we frequently use the expressions “verbally inspired” and “inerrant” in describing the authority and reliability of these sacred documents which God caused His servants to write. See John 10:35, 1 Cor. 2:13, 2 Tim. 3:16, 2 Pet 1:20-21, 2 Pet. 3:15-17, 1 Thes. 1:5, 2:13.



---

## 2. Knowing and Professing the Truth

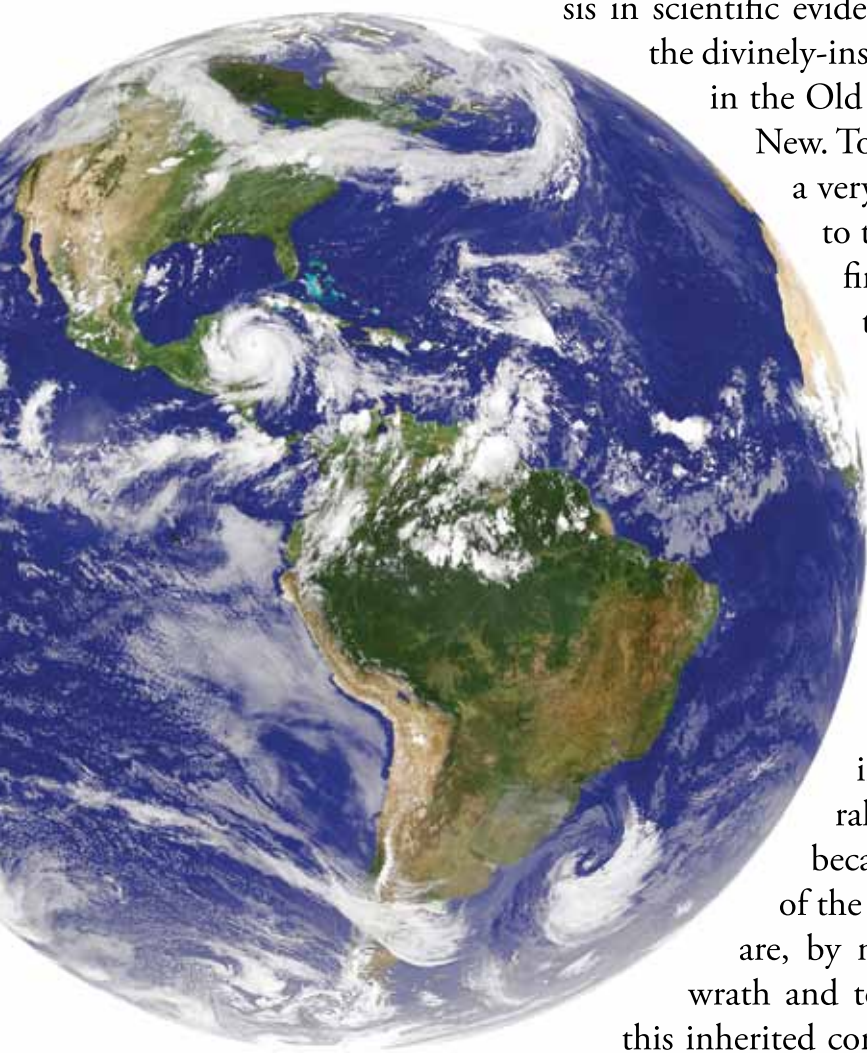
We confess that it is possible both to know the truth of God's Word and to profess it, and that God requires us to do both. Taking one's stand on the Word in matters of doctrine, after diligent study of Scriptures, is an act not of human pride but of humble submission to God's authority. See John 8:31-32, John 17:17, 2 Tim. 1:13, James 1:21b.

## 3. The Creation and the Fall

We confess that God created all things in six days by the power of His Word, exactly as is set forth in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 and elsewhere in Scripture. We therefore reject the theories of "evolution," including "theistic evolution," not only because they lack a sound basis in scientific evidence but especially because they contradict the divinely-inspired account of creation as given by Moses in the Old Testament and confirmed by Christ in the New. To attempt to describe each day of creation as a very long period of time ( a "day-age," etc. ) is to tamper with the clear Word of God, for the first chapter of Genesis records at the end of the account of each day's creation activity that "evening and morning were the (first, second, etc.) day." See Gen. 1 passim, Ex. 20:11, Heb. 11:3, Matt. 19:4.

When Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day they were made in God's image -- that is, they were morally righteous and were in every respect in perfect harmony with God. Through their fall into sin Adam and Eve, with all their natural descendants, lost this righteousness and became by nature sinful and corrupt. Because of the Fall all people conceived in the natural way are, by nature, enemies of God, subject to God's wrath and to physical and spiritual death. Because of this inherited corruption, called "original sin," no person is

able, even partially, to earn favor with God or avoid eternal condemnation by means of his or her own efforts. See Gen. 1:27, 3:6 and 6:5, Ps. 51:5, Rom. 8:7, 1:18, 5:12 and 6:23, Eph. 2:3, Gal. 2:16b.



## 4. Christ's Person and Our Justification

We confess that, in order to rescue fallen mankind, God the Father sent His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into the world.

Throughout the Old Testament era God promised to send a Savior who would crush Satan's power over the human race, and this promise was fulfilled through the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity. Jesus Christ is true God and true man in one Person, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, and He is the world's only Savior

from sin, death, and the devil. Because Jesus was true God, He was able by His divine power to save us all; because He was true man, He was able to be our substitute under God's Law. Christ was tempted in all things as we are but was in every respect without sin. See John 1:1 and 14, Col. 2:9, Matt. 1:23, 1 Tim. 2:5-6.

By His perfect life and His innocent sufferings and death Jesus has redeemed the entire

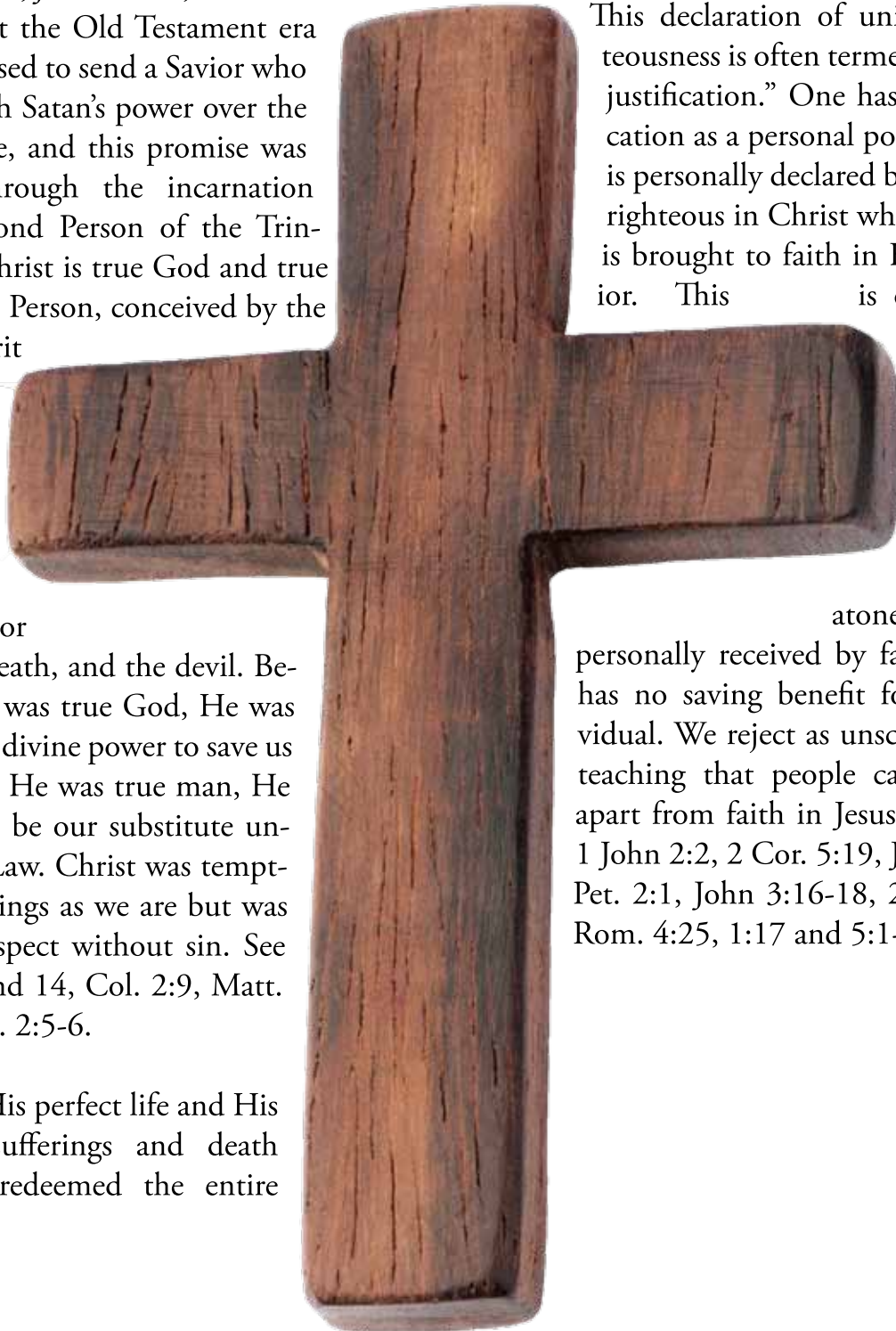
world. God thereby reconciled the world to Himself, and by the resurrection of His Son declared it to be righteous in Christ.

This declaration of universal righteousness is often termed "objective justification." One has this justification as a personal possession and is personally declared by God to be righteous in Christ when he or she is brought to faith in Him as Savior. This is often called

"subjective justification". If the objective fact of Christ's

atonement is not

personally received by faith, then it has no saving benefit for the individual. We reject as unscriptural any teaching that people can be saved apart from faith in Jesus Christ. See 1 John 2:2, 2 Cor. 5:19, John 1:29, 2 Pet. 2:1, John 3:16-18, 2 Cor. 5:19, Rom. 4:25, 1:17 and 5:1-2.







---

## 5. The Means of Grace

We confess that God has instituted certain Means of Grace through which He announces and bestows the forgiveness of sins and the blessings of life and salvation, and through which the Holy Spirit works faith in the individual sinner to receive these blessings. These Means of Grace are His Word of the Gospel, which offers us free salvation through faith in Christ; Holy Baptism, which is described in Scripture as a “washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit;” and the Lord’s Supper, in which the true body and blood of Christ are distributed to the communicants. It is the Word of God connected with the earthly elements which makes Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper effective means through which forgiveness, life and salvation are truly offered to those who receive these sacraments. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, in written, spoken and sacramental form, is able to do all this because it is the power of God Himself.

Holy Baptism has the power to work the new life of faith in the hearts of sinners. This regenerative washing “with water through the Word” is intended for all people, since all -- including infants and children -- are members of a sinful human race and are in need of God’s grace and forgiveness. Jesus has also commanded that “all nations” be baptized. Confession of sins and Absolution are a return to, and a renewal of, one’s Baptism. Holy Absolution, a Means of Grace, is the declaration of forgiveness to penitent sinners in the stead of Christ and by His command. It is not merely a wish that sin be forgiven,

but it is a powerful impartation of forgiveness. According to Christ’s Word and institution, His body and blood are truly present, distributed and received in the Lord’s Supper, under the forms of bread and wine. This Supper is intended for Christians who know and adhere to the teachings of God’s Word, who are able to examine themselves on the basis of that Word, and who repent of their sins and look to Christ alone for forgiveness. The body and blood of Christ are offered and received in this Sacrament for the remission of sins and for the strengthening of faith. The forgiveness of sins which is offered by God through the Means of Grace can be rejected by an unbelieving heart, but it is received for salvation by all who believe in Christ. See Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47, John 15:3, Matt. 28:19, John 3:5, Eph. 5:26, Titus 3:5, Acts 2:38-39, 1 Cor. 10:16-17, 11:23-29, Matt. 26:28, Rom. 1:16, John 20:21-23, Mark 16:16, Rom. 3:28 and 4:5.







---

## 6. Conversion, Good Works, and Prayer

We confess that a person's conversion to faith in Christ is accomplished entirely by the Holy Spirit, working through the Gospel. Because of the effects of original sin, the unregenerate soul does not and cannot cooperate in its conversion from spiritual death and unbelief to spiritual life and faith in Christ. See Eph. 2:4-9, Rom. 10:14-17, 1 Cor. 2:14 and 12:3.

We confess that good works are necessary fruits of faith in the life of a Christian and that they proceed from a renewed heart that is thankful to God for His mercy and love. Although there is no human cooperation in the matter of one's conversion and justification, there is a cooperation on the part of the regenerate Christian in his or her life of sanctification. Good works do not earn or

contribute to one's salvation, but they naturally flow from the living faith which is present in the hearts of those who have already been saved by God's grace alone. See John 15:5, Rom. 6:1-2, Eph. 2:10, Rom. 12:1, Heb. 11:6, 2 Cor. 5:14-15.

We confess that a life of prayer will naturally follow from faith in Christ as Savior and that a believer should bring his or her heartfelt thanks and concerns to God in prayer. It is the teaching of Scripture, however, that God communicates with His people in matters of faith and salvation only through His Word and Sacraments, the Means of Grace. The Christian can be sure that God answers prayer according to His good and gracious will because of the saving merits of Christ. See Phil. 4:6, 1 Thes. 5:17, Matt. 7:7, Rom. 10:17, 1 John 5:14-15, James 5:16b.

## 7. God's Election of Grace

We confess that those in this life who, through the Gospel, have been called, enlightened, sanctified, and preserved in the true faith, have from eternity been elected according to God's unmerited love to this adoption as His children, and have been chosen in Christ "before the creation of the world" to be heirs of everlasting life. Therefore Christians can and should be sure of their salvation, since God's promise is steadfast and His gracious election to salvation stands firm. We reject the teaching that there is an eter-

nal election to damnation (double predestination) and that the offer of salvation which God makes through the Gospel is not earnestly intended for all people. In faith we accept the teaching of Scripture that those who are saved are saved by the grace of God alone, and that those who are lost are lost because of their own unbelief and hardness of heart. See Rom. 8:26-39, Eph. 1:3-6, 2 Thes. 2:13-14, 1 Tim. 1:15, 2 Tim. 1:12, Ezek. 33:11, Hos. 13:9.

## 8. The Church and the Ministry

We confess that there is one holy Christian Church which consists of all those who from the heart truly believe in Christ as Savior and Lord. This Church, in its essence, is invisible to our eyes, since no one can judge the sincerity of another's heart, but it is known to God. We believe that the Church is to be found wherever the Word of God and the Sacraments are in use. The Church of Jesus Christ is not to be equated with any particular denomination or church body, or with the sum total of all Christian denominations and church bodies. It is the will of God that Christians should gather together regularly for mutual edification through Word and Sacrament, and that they should work together to promote the extension of God's pure Means of Grace throughout the world. See Luke 17:20, 2 Tim. 2:19, Eph. 4:4-6, Heb. 10:25, Mark 16:15.



We confess that the Lord has instituted the office of the Public Ministry so that His Means of Grace may be publicly administered for the well-being of His Church. Those in this office by virtue of God's call through the church perform their duties on behalf of the church and in the name and in the stead of Christ. We believe that no one should

publicly preach or administer the Sacraments without a proper call. When God's Word says that women are not to teach or "exercise authority" over men in the church, this means that the pastoral office cannot be conferred upon women, and that it is God's will that only properly qualified men be called to this office. According to this same principle women should not exercise authority over men in the congregational decision-making process,

such as by holding voting membership in an assembly which makes the final decisions for a church. (Because Christian men and women are all members of the Body of Christ and share in the privileges and duties of the "priesthood of all believers," the views of women should be taken into account when such decisions are made.) See John 21:15-18, Acts 20:28, Rom. 10:14-15, Eph. 4:11, 1 Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1:5, 1 Cor. 14:34, 1 Tim. 2:12, 1 Pet. 2:9, Gal. 3:28.

## 9. The Last Things

We confess that at the time of physical death a believer's soul goes to heaven and an unbeliever's soul goes to hell. On the Last Day, Christ will return visibly to the world and will raise the bodies of all the dead, both believers and unbelievers, at which time their bodies and souls will be reunited. The believers will enter into eternal life in "the new heavens and the new earth," but the unbelievers will be cast forever into "the fiery lake of burning sulphur." We reject the teaching that the soul

has no continuing, conscious existence after the time of physical death (a soul sleep) and the teaching that the souls of unbelievers will

be annihilated on the Day of Judgment. We also reject as unbiblical all forms of millennialism, that is, the teaching that Christ will reign visibly over an earthly kingdom for a thousand years before the Day of Resurrection and Judgment. See Matt. 25:31-46, John 5:28-29, Mark 16:16, Eccl. 12:7, Luke 23:43, Mark 13:32-37, Luke 18:8, John 18:36.





## 10. Church Fellowship

We confess that Scripture requires that church fellowship be recognized and practiced where there is a mutual confession of and commitment to the pure Marks of the Church, the Word and Sacraments. Jesus Christ is the Head of His Church, and He governs and teaches it by His Word, but deviation from the teaching of God's Word is not to be tolerated in the church. We therefore reject unionism, that is, church fellowship with adherents of false doctrine, and ecumenical endeavors which compromise the pure doctrine of God's Word. We also reject participation or membership in religious organizations

which have features that are in conflict with the Christian faith, such as the Masonic Lodge and similar organizations. At the same time we also condemn separatism, i.e., the refusal to acknowledge and practice fellowship when there is agreement in doctrine. See John 8:31-32, 1 Cor. 1:10, Eph. 2:19-20, Matt. 7:15-20, Rom. 16:17, Gal. 1:6-9, 2 John 9-11, Matt. 23:8, 1 Pet. 4:11, 2 Cor. 6:14-18.

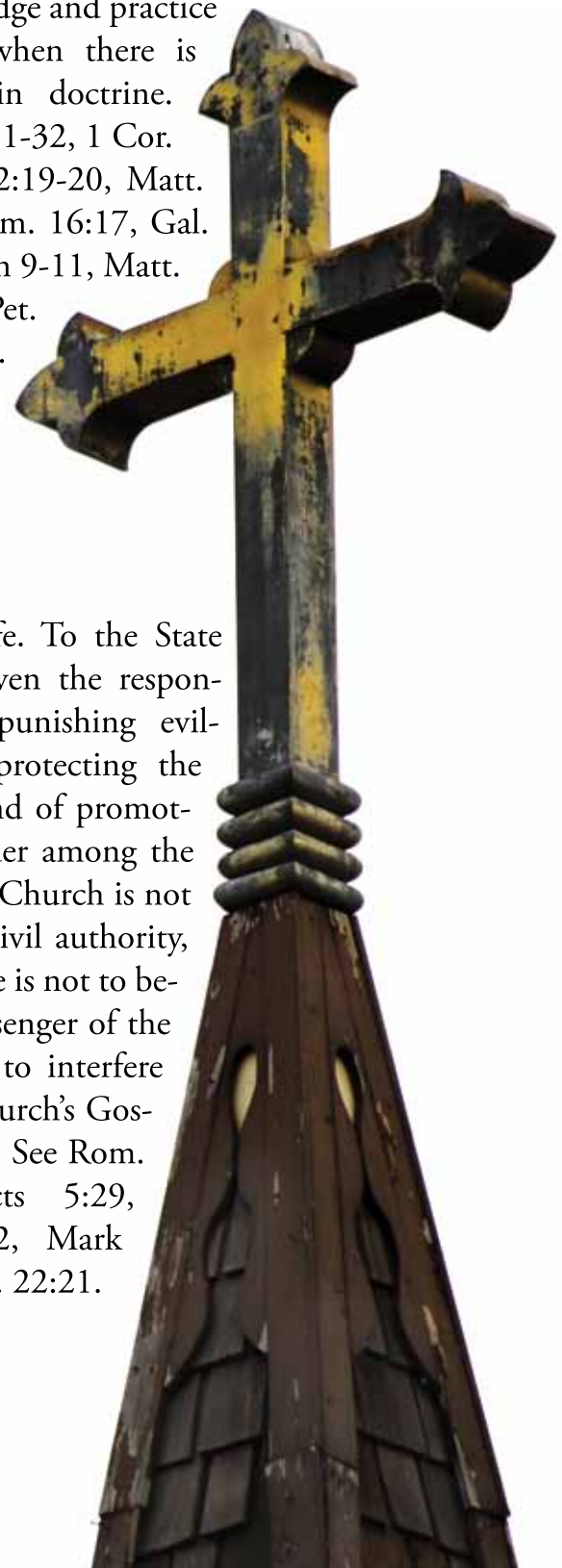
## 11. Church and State

We confess that God has assigned certain responsibilities to the Church and certain responsibilities to the State, which do not conflict with each other. The Church and the

State are each to operate within their own sphere of responsibility, using only those means which God has entrusted to each to carry out their God-given tasks.

To the Church God has given the responsibility of calling sinners to repentance, preaching forgiveness through the cross of Christ, and encouraging believers in their

Christian life. To the State God has given the responsibility of punishing evil-doers and protecting the innocent, and of promoting civil order among the people. The Church is not to exercise civil authority, and the State is not to become a messenger of the Gospel nor to interfere with the Church's Gospel ministry. See Rom. 13:1-7, Acts 5:29, 1 Tim. 2:2, Mark 16:15, Matt. 22:21.

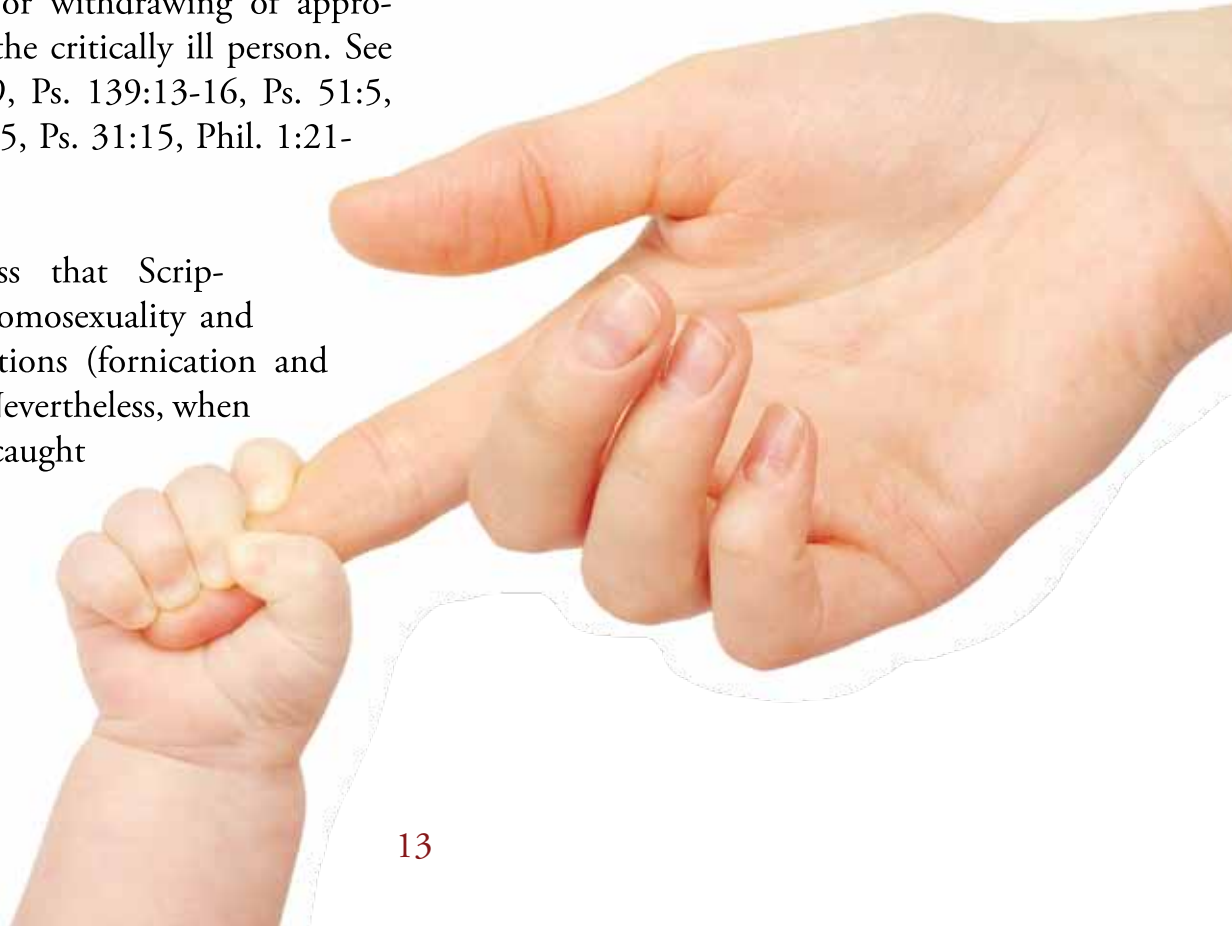


## 12. Human Life and Human Sexuality

We confess that Scripture upholds the sanctity of human life. We recognize that God has given the State the right to administer capital punishment and wage just wars, but we believe that any taking of human life beyond that which is authorized by God is to be abhorred. We believe that all human life has intrinsic value, regardless of its perceived “quality,” and that God calls on us to preserve His gift of life. Because abortion results in the death of an unborn human being, we believe that it is never justified except in those rare and tragic circumstances when the continuation of the pregnancy would clearly threaten the life of the mother. Abortion for any other reason is a great sin in the eyes of God. Because God is the giver and taker of life, we condemn any deliberate efforts to shorten one’s own life or the life of another, for example: suicide, euthanasia (mercy killing), and the withholding or withdrawing of appropriate care from the critically ill person. See Rom. 13:4 and 9, Ps. 139:13-16, Ps. 51:5, Luke 1:41, Jer. 1:5, Ps. 31:15, Phil. 1:21-26, Lev. 19:16.

We confess that Scripture condemns homosexuality and extra-marital relations (fornication and adultery) as sin. Nevertheless, when an individual caught up in such sins truly repents, the forgiveness of the Gospel is to be

fully applied. We confess that the divine institution of marriage is to be heterosexual, in which, according to God’s design, a man and a woman may enjoy a life-long companionship in mutual love. We teach on the basis of Holy Scripture that marriage is the only proper context for the expression of sexual intimacy and for the procreation of children. See Rom. 1:26-27, 1 Cor. 6:9, 18 and 7:2-9, John 4:17-18, 1 John 1:9, Gen. 1:27-28 and 2:18-24, Matt. 19:4-6.





## 13. The Lutheran Confessions

As orthodox, confessional Lutherans, we embrace as our primary confessions of faith the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord of 1580, namely, the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds; the Augsburg Confession and its Apology; the Smalcald Articles (including the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope); Luther's Small and Large Catechisms and the Formula of Concord (Epitome and Solid Declaration). We accept these Confessions, not in so far as

but because they agree with Scripture, and we believe that they are a correct exposition of the teaching of God's Word. Adherence to these confessions, drawn from Scripture, is in keeping with St. Peter's exhortation: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Pet. 3:15). See also Heb. 13:7-9a.





# A Brief History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod



The Evangelical Lutheran Synod had its origin among the early settlers of Norwegian descent who came to America during the 19th century. As they settled in the wilderness of Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota and other states they had no churches, no pastors, no schools, no spiritual leadership. But by God's grace help soon came. Pastors from their homeland arrived and helped organize congregations. One of the first pastors held services in a barn and also outdoors under

two oak trees at a place called "Koshkonong" near Madison, Wisconsin. Finally in 1853 the first church body among these settlers was organized. It was known as the "Norwegian Synod."



*Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, Minnesota*

The pioneers of the Synod soon came in contact with other Lutherans of older synods in the country. Many of these were found to be very lax in doctrine and practice. In the latter 1850s, however, they met an outstanding Lutheran leader named Dr. C.F.W. Walther and recognized in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod of that day a truly Lutheran church body

with whom they could safely fellowship. In July of 1872 they joined with the Wisconsin Synod, the Missouri Synod and other synods in forming the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference.

The Church Militant here on earth will never find perfect peace and rest. In the 1880s a controversy over the doctrine of election divided the synod, and in 1917 a merger brought together various groups of Norwegian churches into a

new church body. A small group of pastors and congregations, however, refused to enter into this merger because it was based upon the false teaching that man could somehow cooperate in his conversion.

The doctrine that our conversion is due to God's grace alone was therefore compromised. In order to retain the truth this little group bravely determined to reorganize the old Synod on the basis of clear teachings of Scripture. They therefore gathered at Lime Creek Lutheran Church near Lake Mills, Iowa, in June of 1918 and reorganized as the Norwegian Synod. The name was

---

later changed to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

The Lord blessed this little flock. It soon began to grow and become strong and healthy. In 1927 it began operating Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota. In 1946 it established its own theological seminary also at Bethany. It carries on an active home mission program and now has about 130 congregations in many states. The ELS also has foreign missions in Peru, Chile, India, Korea, Ukraine, Czech Republic and Latvia.

Having left the old Synodical Conference for doctrinal reasons, the synod in 1993 joined in establishing a new alliance known as the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, composed of over twenty church bodies from around the world, including the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in the USA. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod therefore represents conservative, confessional Lutheranism, and its prayer is that God by grace will preserve it in its total allegiance to the inspired and inerrant Word of God.



*Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota*



Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
6 Browns Court  
Mankato, MN 56001  
[www.els.name](http://www.els.name)