

# The EVANGEL

The Lutheran Confessions





# From the Editor

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Greetings! In this installment of our year's study in the Lutheran life, we look at The Lutheran Confessions: where they come from and why they are worth studying.

Now before some of you put this edition down, thinking "that's just for pastors or smart people," allow me to ask: you've heard of *Luther's Small Catechism*, right? Guess what? That is part of our Lutheran Confessions: a simple introduction to Scriptural truth, written to enable parents and others to teach children the faith. These basic truths still apply today, even for us "grownups."

For example, The Apostles Creed: We recite it regularly in church, but to remember the meanings of the various parts can be greatly encouraging.

When stressed about your bank balance or the economy, turn to the meaning of the first part, or article, of the Creed: "I believe that God... richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life... All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me."<sup>1</sup>

Or if you are troubled about your salvation, turn to the meaning of the third part, or article, of the Creed: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."<sup>2</sup>

As we learn these simple truths, we can more readily spot errors that creep into messages around us. A book with "liturgy" in the title recently caught my eye. I skimmed through the introduction and was dismayed at what I read. The author defined confession as a way to merely prevent delusion in ourselves, but no mention of a God who hears our confession. Then she wrote she had no certainty when it came to absolution, so perhaps the readers could... forgive themselves? How sad!

What does Lutheran theology teach about confession and absolution? Well, you guessed it: take a look in *Luther's Small Catechism* for much better definitions that turn your eyes to your heavenly Father for peace and comfort.

So, I hope the articles on these pages prompt you to dust off your catechism and do a little reading. And as one writer suggests, I would be happy to hear from anyone doing more study on these topics. Email me at [theevangel@taalc.org](mailto:theevangel@taalc.org).

Learning and growing with you,

*Gretchen Baker*

Gretchen Baker  
The Editor

- 3 Presiding Pastor
- 5 Confessions:  
Historical Context
- 6 Confessions:  
Subscription
- 8 Confessions:  
Foundational
- 10 Joy 4 Ukraine Ministry
- 12 Hartley Ordained
- 13 WOL Advent Brunch
- 13-14 Prayer Bookmark
- 14 In Memoriam: Conrad  
and General Convention  
Announcement
- 15 Reformation Event

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Layout & Design: Karen Young

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1 Martin Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 16.

2 Ibid, 17.



# THE BINDING AUTHORITY OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

By Rev. Dr. Cary Larson

When a person declares themselves to be a Lutheran, it carries profound theological implications that transcend mere denominational affiliation. The assertion is not merely a denominational label among the many choices in Christianity; rather, it signifies a commitment to a specific doctrinal foundation deeply rooted in the inerrant and infallible teachings found exclusively in Holy Scripture.

Dr. Lars P. Qualben, an American Lutheran Church professor, encapsulates this perspective succinctly in his work titled “The Lutheran Church in Colonial America.” Qualben emphasizes that Lutheranism is not an addition or subtraction from Christian teachings but a restoration of the original Christian Church, as Luther termed it, the Apostolic Evangelical Church.<sup>1</sup>

To be a Lutheran, then, is to align with the teachings that have been upheld since the presentation of the Augsburg Confession before the Emperor in 1530. It is an unwavering belief in the inerrancy of Holy Scripture, as expounded by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther and the reformers of the Lutheran Church.

However, there exists a significant challenge within the Lutheran community in the United States. Some who identify as Lutherans only consider the Holy Scriptures as “inspired”

and view the Lutheran Confessions as historical guides to be followed “in so far as” they agree with Scripture. This stance implies a conditional subscription, a contradiction in terms, and, in essence, no real subscription at all. The crux of the matter lies in determining who holds the authority to decide if a part of the Lutheran Confessions aligns with Holy Scripture or not.

In contrast, there are Lutheran bodies, such as The American Association of Lutheran Churches, that steadfastly adhere to a “*quia*” (kwee-uh) subscription. This means trusting the Lutheran Confessions BECAUSE they are in full agreement with the inerrant, infallible, and inspired Holy Scriptures. In simpler terms, nothing in the Lutheran Confessions contradicts or adds anything to God’s Holy Word; it is God’s Word that validates the Lutheran Confessions. Hence, such Lutherans are often referred to as “Confessional Lutherans.”

This distinction is not a matter of Lutheran politics; rather, it profoundly shapes how Lutherans understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Lutheran Confessions, with their binding authority, serve as a framework that offers clarity on crucial Gospel truths. The importance of a “*quia*” subscription to the Lutheran Confessions becomes evident when examining key doctrinal aspects:

*continued on page 4*



## Binding Authority continued...

**Clear Understanding of Justification:** The Lutheran Confessions provide a clear understanding of justification. They emphasize that Christians are declared righteous by faith in Christ Jesus apart from their own works. This assurance becomes a source of comfort, assuring believers that their salvation is based on the grace of God received through faith.

**Emphasis on Christ Alone:** The Confessions consistently emphasize Christ Jesus as the center of the Gospel message. Salvation, according to the Lutheran Confessions, comes through Christ alone. The focus remains on His sacrificial atoning work on Calvary's cross as the foundation for forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

**Rejection of Works-Righteousness:** The Lutheran Confessions reject any notion of earning salvation through human means. Subscribers to the binding authority of the Lutheran Confessions understand that salvation is a free gift of God's grace, and individuals contribute nothing to their justification apart from faith.

**Affirmation of *Sola Scriptura*:** As faithful summaries of Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions affirm the principle of *Sola Scriptura*, asserting that Scripture alone is the ultimate authority for matters of faith and life. This reinforces the clarity that the Gospel message is ultimately derived from and rooted in the inerrant, infallible, and inspired Word of God.

**Distinction Between Law and Gospel:** The Lutheran Confessions teach a sharp distinction between Law and Gospel, contributing to clarity in understanding the necessity and different functions of God's Law and Gospel in the Christian life.

**Pastoral Comfort and Assurance:** The chief focus of the Lutheran Confessions is to address and bring solace to distressed consciences. Believing in their binding authority means trusting in the Lutheran Confessions' ability to provide clear and comforting assurances of God's forgiveness and love through Christ Jesus for all people.

Believing in the binding authority of the Lutheran Confessions provides a distinct and precise proclamation of Gospel truths found in the Holy Scriptures. It shapes a theological framework that maintains a clear understanding of justification, emphasizes Christ alone, rejects works-righteousness, affirms *Sola Scriptura*, distinguishes between Law and Gospel, and offers pastoral comfort and assurance. This commitment to a "*quia*" subscription is not just a doctrinal position; it is a foundational perspective that defines the essence of being a Confessional Lutheran. †

*The Rev. Dr. Cary G. Larson serves The AALC as Presiding Pastor.*



*The Lutheran Confessions, with their binding authority, serve as a framework that offers clarity on crucial Gospel truths.*

<sup>1</sup> Lars P. Qualben, *The Lutheran Church in Colonial America* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 1.



# Confessions



## Historical Context and The Church Today

By Rev. Neil Cadle

Two pastors have a disagreement. One says that contrition is worked in us through God's Law; the other claims it is the Gospel that brings us to repentance. Semantics? Or an argument that led to "Radical Lutheranism"—which reduces God's Law to the bad things that happen in the world and therefore teaches that the Law is bad and unnecessary for salvation.

Radical Lutheranism is real, embraced by many of the liberal Lutheran bodies around the world. But the argument is much older, between Luther himself and John Agricola in 1527. Is there a connection? I believe we can find the answer to that question in the *Book of Concord*, which most Confessional Lutherans would agree that, next to the Bible itself, is the most important book to help us understand the Christian faith. But other than the Small Catechism, how many Lutherans have actually read anything in it? Can we even list all the documents that comprise the *Book of Concord*?

Perhaps a more important question to ask is, *Why* is the *Book of Concord* important? It contains what we call the *Lutheran Confessions*, the collection of foundational documents that is a faithful interpretation of Scripture and summarizes the basic doctrines of the Christian Faith. As such, we believe we need look no further than the Bible and these confessions to find God's revealed Truth.

### History Repeats Itself

How is this possible? How could documents written almost 500 years ago in the Holy Roman Empire be of any use to us today? First, truth doesn't change. The basic teachings about God and the faith remain as valid today as they were for the very first Christians. Second, the situation of God's Church today is more similar to that of the Reformation than we might think. Almost every document in the *Book of Concord* was written in response to a problem or a controversy that the Church was experiencing—and is experiencing yet today.

The Nicene Creed, for example, written in AD 325, was written in response to the Arian heresy that had divided the Church over the nature of Christ's divinity. Luther's catechisms (1529) came about after Luther visited several churches of the Reformation and witnessed the severe lack of basic Christian knowledge among laity

and clergy alike. The Formula of Concord (1577) sought to bring doctrinal unity back to the churches of the Reformation; this unity began to deteriorate just months after Luther's death in 1546.

Does any of that sound familiar? Do we, almost 2,000 years later, still have division in the Church over the identity of Jesus? Unfortunately, we can still find church bodies and leaders who question or deny that the Son is of the same Substance as the Father. Can documents like the Nicene Creed be helpful today? Absolutely.

Is there still a lack of knowledge of the basic teachings of the faith as there was in Luther's day? Strike up a conversation with the average churchgoer, and you will likely find the answer to be "yes". Whether you ask about sin, justification, free will, the real presence, or election, and if you don't get a blank stare in response, you will often receive an answer that is not in harmony with Scripture, the Early Church, and the Lutheran Confessions. Can documents like the Large and Small Catechisms be helpful today? Absolutely.

Is there still a lack of unity among Christians (and even among Lutherans) today? Many celebrity pastors spend more time railing against other church bodies than they do proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus. Are there still pastors who feel the need to "spice up" foundational doctrines to make them more appealing? The very things that the Formula of Concord addressed when it was first written—controversies between leaders of theological movements as well as teaching errors by pastors within the Lutheran Church—continue to occur today. Can documents like the Formula of Concord be helpful today? Absolutely.

As it says in Ecclesiastes 1:9, "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun." Every problem we experience in the Church today has been a problem before. When we understand why the documents that comprise the *Book of Concord* were written—what controversy or error they were addressing—we can be better equipped to confront that same controversy or error today. And we can likely use that very same document to counter that error with the Truth of God. †

*The Rev. Neil Cadle serves Bethel Lutheran Church of Rowland, PA, and serves on The AALC's Parish Education Commission.*





## *Confessional Subscription*

# What Is It and Why Does It Matter?

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*By Rev. Dave Spotts*

Our church body, The American Association of Lutheran Churches, affirms that the Lutheran Confessions, including the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord are binding upon us because they are a fair and accurate summary of the teachings of Scripture. The good Lutheran, based on *Luther's Small Catechism* (another one of our confessional documents), would ask, "What do you mean by that?"

It's a completely fair question to ask of any church body. In fact, you shouldn't go joining a church or any other organization without understanding and agreeing with what it stands for. For instance, lots of churches say they believe the Bible. That's great, but what do they mean by that? We also believe the Bible to be infallible, inerrant, and inspired by God. Our Clergy Commission regularly asks people to explain their views about the Bible. It matters.

We need to be of one mind about the central tenets of our faith!

Since so many church bodies confess that they believe the Bible, and will use words like infallible, inerrant, and inspired, it helps to find a means of clarifying what we mean. This is where an appropriate use of tradition comes into play.

"Okay," you say, "Now he's done it. The Bible and tradition? Give me a break! That sounds like something that belongs in the Roman Catholic Church!"



*Since so many church bodies confess that they believe the Bible, and will use words like infallible, inerrant, and inspired, it helps to find a means of clarifying what we mean.*



I think we need to evaluate the role of tradition in our interpretation, though. In fact, you think so also. Before rejecting the idea of tradition out of hand, where will you stand on interpretive tradition? Does each Christian have an obligation to ignore all past interpreters? If we reject tradition, does that also mean that we self-consciously reject any interpretation of Scripture anyone has held in the past? This throws us into a dystopian world of exegesis in which “I” am the only one who can be right, and can only be right by carefully dodging anything anyone else has ever thought is right in the past.

Rather than experiencing an implosion of the entire world, let’s entertain a right role of tradition in our interpretation. Christianity has had about two millennia to try answering some important questions. Many times as we have worked with these interpretive concepts carefully, our scholars have developed good explanations of what the Scripture means and how it should be applied to our lives and our world. After all, the Word of God is intended to be clear and reliable. We should expect that most careful thinkers and interpreters would come to approximately the same interpretations, and that they would normally be right. This is why we don’t reject all the history of Christian interpretation out of hand.

In the 16th century Reformation, a good deal of effort was put into clarifying some of the issues surrounding the conflict between the Roman church and the Evangelicals, who later became known as Lutherans. This led to the publication of the Augsburg Confession in 1530, which described many ways in which the Evangelicals held practices consistent with their Roman past. The Smalcald Articles, published in 1537, served as a presentation of truth claims which took the place of testimony in person by Dr. Martin Luther. Later, in 1578, the Formula of Concord was developed, describing the doctrines which identified and held the Lutheran Christians together. These three documents, along with some ancillary helps and explanations make up the bulk of the Book of Concord, first published in 1580. The Confessions serve to clarify the Christian interpretation of the first Lutherans, defending their teaching and practice.

The Lutheran Confessions contribute to our understanding of the Christian faith because they are careful evaluations of theological statements, considered in light of Scriptures. Through a review of the concepts found in the Lutheran Confessions, we find a comprehensive summary of a biblical view on the topics included in the Confessions. The content of these Confessions has been tested and tried many times over nearly 450 years. Time and again, they have proven to be a fair and accurate summary of the teachings of Scripture.

When I teach a topical Bible study, the Lutheran Confessions are my go-to resource. They are chock full of solid biblical exposition. They raise timeless questions and life problems. A good edition normally has an extensive index of Scripture passages. Through use of our Confessions, we can know that we stand in a good place in our theology, our understanding of humanity, of the work of the church, and our role in society. We affirm them because they are a right exposition of Scripture.

Does your church congregation have a study of the Book of Concord or some of the Lutheran Confessions? I’m sure the *Evangel* editor would love to have letters from people talking about studies they are doing. Since our church body subscribes to these Confessions, we do well to devote some of our study to them. Now is a great time to gather with likeminded Christians, pull out a Book of Concord and your Bibles, and be like the Bereans in Acts 17: study the Scriptures to find out if what we are saying is true!

For further study, you might find the following resources helpful:

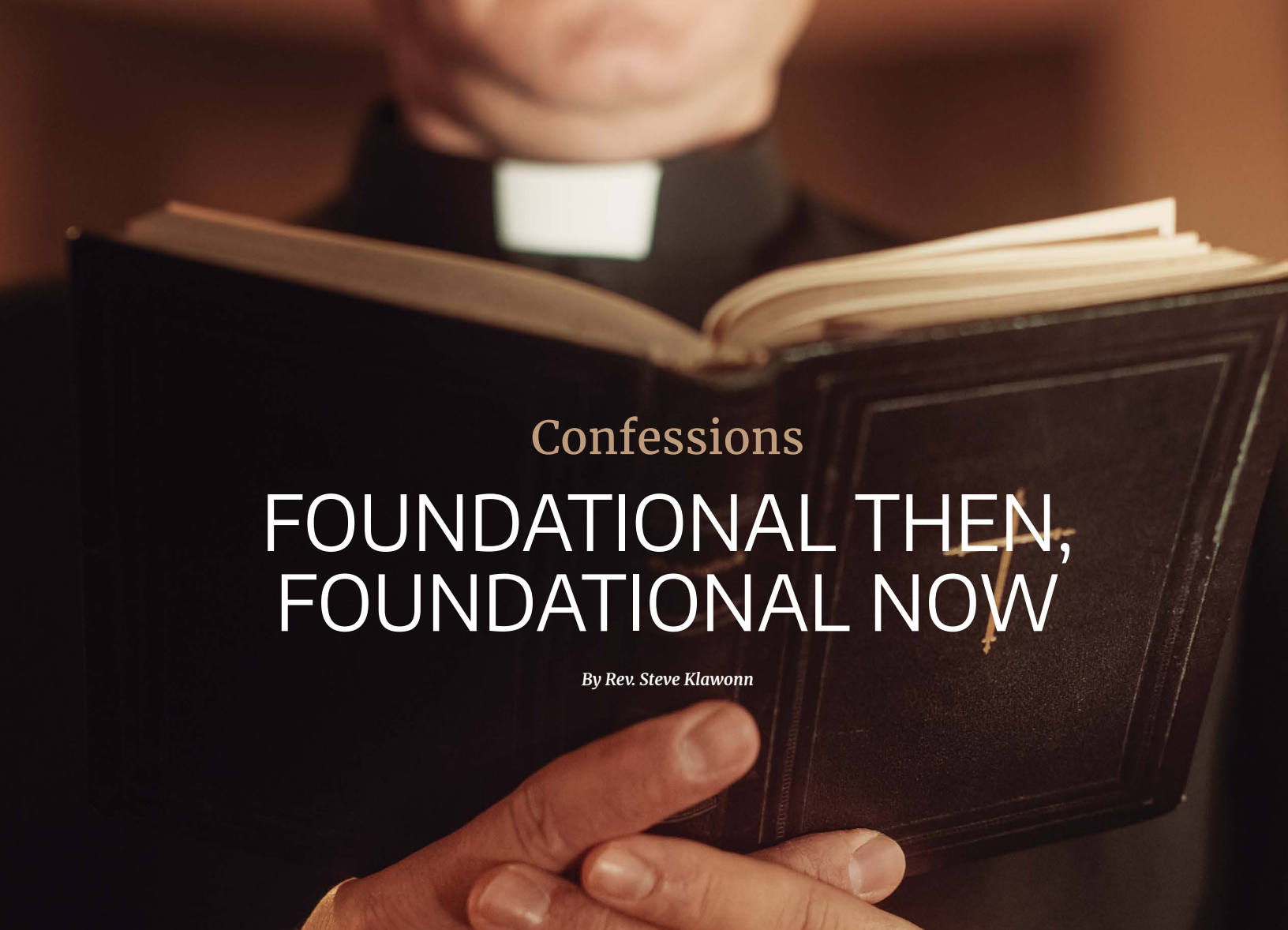
[www.bookofconcord.org](http://www.bookofconcord.org) provides a lightly searchable version of the 1921 edition of the *Book of Concord* as translated into English by F. Bente and W.H.T. Dau.

Concordia Publishing House in St. Louis has issued *A Reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord* based on the same translation, but with some updates to the language and with extensive footnotes and introductory editorial information. This work is in its second edition, 2006.

The definitive 20th century edition, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* translated and edited by Theodore Tappert was published by Fortress Press in Philadelphia, 1959.

In 2000, a new scholarly edition, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* was released in a new translation, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, by Fortress Press, now in Minneapolis. This edition is gradually taking the place of the 1959 Tappert edition, though both are excellent scholarly works.†

*The Rev. Dave Spotts serves as a missionary chaplain to the college campuses in Columbia, MO, under the auspices of Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry, a mission of The AALC.*



## Confessions

# FOUNDATIONAL THEN, FOUNDATIONAL NOW

By Rev. Steve Klawonn

“That more than 8,000 theologians could agree on a statement of Christian doctrine after decades of discord and debate was indeed a significant achievement. That the Formula of Concord of 1577 has survived the test of almost 450 years is more significant.”<sup>1</sup>

After the death of the great reformer Martin Luther, so many factions of the church started to assert themselves with individual theological positions that many times, they would contradict each other and the Holy Scriptures. This was Luther’s fear during his life, as he placed such great emphasis on the persistent and consistent reliance on the inerrant Word of God. When theologians gathered to discuss the Holy Scriptures and craft a unified statement of faith, the mere evidence of this Formula even today testifies to the principle that was espoused by Luther. When it came to the foundation of Scriptural authority, the proclamation by Luther of “Here I stand,” was the bedrock that all future doctrines of the Lutheran Church were built upon. It is the faithful reliance on the Scriptures that is our only hope of future religious concord and the blessings that will be realized by it.

With that objective in mind, very specific documents were gathered or crafted for the specific purpose of creating the unity

of faith and a common declaration of that faith by the leaders of the churches, so as not to create confusion and discord. These documents: *Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms*, The Augsburg Confession, The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, The Smalcald Articles and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, along with the Formula of Concord, were to be used as helpful tools for anyone in ministry and anyone who wanted to expand their understanding of the Christian faith.

You may think it strange that with the inerrant Word of God as a resource for pastors and church leaders that divisions have appeared within Christendom. The Scriptures as the only source to draw upon for saving knowledge of God’s plan of salvation, therefore only one doctrine, one faith<sup>2</sup>, should have left very little room for error and differences of opinion. Yet, we see throughout history that man’s own understanding at trying to make God’s revelation to us fit into our logical thinking, has caused wide splits in Christendom, despite Scripture’s teaching: “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment,” (1 Cor. 1:10).



## Foundational then and now continued...

Such controversial divisions are due solely to the fact that certain men emerged in the church and because of their charismatic presence and abilities of communication, gained a following of people who were not committed to the Word; these men preached their own word, no matter if it conformed to the Truth or not. The theologians of Luther's day understood how dangerous this was to the Christian faith and the need to call out such "false prophets" and their errors that they promoted.

1 Cor. 14:37 proclaims, "If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord." We are to preach, teach, and confess the whole Word of God and nothing else. Those who fail to do this will ultimately exchange the Truth for a false hope, the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith, with the religion of works.

To better understand what exactly the theologians in the 1500's were facing, I will give a brief synopsis and summary of at least the main controversies. These controversies were discussed, studied against the teachings of Scripture, and were settled, or truth explained in the first eleven articles of the Formula of Concord. They are addressed in a dogmatic, or a clear and emphatic teaching, that can be understood by the Church and fellow Christians on the source and nature of Christian Theology.

There was the so-called Adiaphoristic Controversy from 1548-1555, in which theologians such as Melancthon, Eber, and Pfeffinger, defended the Leipzig Interim and the reintroduction of certain Romish ceremonies back into the Lutheran Church. They were opposed in their stance by what we might call today "Confessional Lutherans," those who championed a consistent and determined way of doing things for the sake of unity and good order. This controversy is addressed in Article X.

The Majoristic Controversy from 1551-1562 came about when George Major and Justus Menius defended the phrase of Melancthon that good works are necessary to salvation. In trying to oppose this teaching, it is easy to fall into the opposite error of proclaiming that good works are detrimental to salvation. To avoid falling into either "ditch," this controversy was settled in Article IV.

The Synergistic Controversy from 1555 - 1560 was about the teaching that man, by his own natural powers, cooperates in his conversion. The opponents to this error taught that God alone converts man... He does not exclude the will, but all efficaciousness and operation of the same. This is addressed in Article II.

The Flacian Controversy, from 1560 - 1575, maintained that original sin is not an accident, but the very substance of fallen man. This is addressed in Article I.

In the Osiandristic and the Stancaric Controversis from 1549 - 1566, Osiander denied the forensic character of justification and taught that Christ is our righteousness only according to His divine nature, while Stancarus taught that Christ is our righteousness according to His human nature only. These controversies were addressed and settled in Article III.

The Antinomistic Controversy from 1527 - 1556, espoused various false views concerning Law and Gospel, especially by Agricola who believed that repentance is not wrought by the Law, but by the Gospel. The questions involved in these Antinomian controversies were decided in Articles V and VI.

The Crypto - Calvinistic Controversy from 1560 - 1574, involved the Philippists in Wittenberg, Leipzig and Dresden who tried to replace Luther's doctrines concerning the Lord's Supper and the majesty of the human nature of Christ with the Calvinistic teachings on these points. In 1574, they were publicly revealed as deceivers and Calvinistic schemers. This was settled in Articles VII and VIII.

The last two controversies first involved John Aepinus who taught that Christ's descent into hell was a part of His suffering and humiliation. Then John Marbach publicly denounced Zanchi, a Crypto - Calvinist, for teaching that faith, once instilled in a person, cannot be lost. These two questions are explored and dealt with in Articles IX and XI respectively.<sup>3</sup>

As you are reminded of the various divisions and controversies found in the 1500's, it is my hope that it encourages you to go back and review once again the Formula of Concord. You see, the controversies then, are very much the same controversies we face today in Christendom. It is in our study and deeper understanding of the past, that will help sustain us in defending the faith and calling out false doctrine today.

Even as we give thanks for the endurance and effectiveness of the Lutheran Confessions, we should be cautious that we don't use them to contribute to divisiveness or to separation from the rest of Christendom. It is meant to be used as a tool to unite, and we pray that it will become the basis for unity with all Christians since it is simply an exposition of Biblical truths.<sup>4</sup>

I pray that we Lutherans, along with all Christians, define our way of life in Christ through the public confession of our faith, as we serve God, by serving our neighbor in truth and love. †

*The Rev. Steve Klawonn serves Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Evansdale, IA, and as Assistant to the Presiding Pastor.*

1 Robert D. Preus & Wilbert Rosen, *A Contemporary Look At The Formula of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 9.

2 Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics: Volume 1* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 22.

3 Gerhard Bente, *Historical Introduction to the Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), 239-240.

4 Robert D. Preus & Wilbert Rosen, *A Contemporary Look At The Formula of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 10.



# Joy 4 Ukraine Ministry Continues

By Rev. Scott Yount

There is a great joy in knowing that we are not justified before God by our own strength, merits, or work, but are freely justified for Christ's sake through faith. This is the teaching of the fourth article of the Augsburg Confession, and it is the foundation of our Christian faith.

Joy 4 Ukraine is about bringing this article "4" joy to the people of Ukraine, especially youth with special needs. 2024 will mark ten years of being a full-time missionary in Ukraine. In those ten years, one of my greatest joys has been getting to know Serhii Sheptitsky, a young man with special needs.

Serhii had an operation in his childhood to remove a tumor from his spine. Unfortunately, the operation left him paralyzed from the waist down. There are many challenges to having a disability in Ukraine. Most buildings, streets, and public transit systems are not handicap accessible. Serhii lives on the seventh floor of an old soviet constructed apartment building. From the first-floor elevator to the street, there are stairs he must go down to exit the building, that is, if the elevator is working at all. I know how many obstacles he faces every day to get around his city. That is why I am so amazed by him. He would travel an hour navigating the city roads to come to the orphanage in our city to help volunteer for our camp. Serhii traveled every day to a nearby school to train in the sport of wheelchair fencing. Through hard work, Serhii is now a member of the Ukrainian national team.

In October 2023, I had the opportunity to travel to Terni, Italy, to watch Serhii compete at the World Wheelchair Fencing Championships. For the last 18 months, Serhii has been living and training in Germany because of Russia's war against Ukraine. I know he really wants to come home to Ukraine, but the situation in Ukraine is unpredictable. Last winter brought constant blackouts, causing the elevator in his building not to work. This winter they are expecting the power situation to be even worse. I miss him a lot, and not knowing when a World Championship would be any closer to Ukraine than Italy, I decided to go and support him and another one of our former campers Olga Yesina, while I had the chance.

I was amazed by the skill and determination of these athletes. There were competitors from all over the world. Overall Serhii won 6 of his 8 qualifying matches, which put him as the second seed for the elimination rounds. Serhii won the quarterfinal match 15-10 against an Italian athlete who was competing in front of the home crowd. This win guaranteed a bronze medal for Serhii. In the semi-finals, he faced a tough competitor from Japan who would go on to win the gold. It was a back-and-forth match with his opponent pulling away at the very end to win 15-12. I know Serhii really wanted that gold medal, but receiving a bronze is a big deal. It is his first medal at the world championships, and I believe the first of many.





Page 10: Rev. Scott Yount with his wife Lena minister to Ukrainians through regular worship services, camps, and weekly visits.

Top: During the Christmas season, they delivered gifts to children in their homes. Submitted photos.

Bottom: Serhii Sheptitsky, brother in Christ from Ukraine, traveled to the World Wheelchair Fencing Championships in Italy in October 2023, winning the bronze medal. He is pictured with Rev. Scott Yount, who met him through the Joy 4 Ukraine ministry. Serhii was introduced to Joy 4 Ukraine Ministry as a youth and now helps at the camps. Submitted photos.



From the life altering complications during his operation on his spine, to paralympic medalist, it has been an unbelievable journey. I remember Serhii sharing with me that before he came to camp the first time, he hadn't left his apartment in two years. He struggled with depression and shame and would even ask his mom to hide his wheelchair on the balcony when he had visitors. But camp changed his life. Through a week of some crazy Americans who came teaching the Bible, doing silly skits, singing fun camp songs, and pouring out the love of Jesus, God began to change his life. Being around other children with disabilities helped him know he wasn't alone, and he began to have hope for his future.

Fast forward to today and Serhii is now inspiring and bringing joy to kids with special needs in Ukraine. It is amazing to see him now being a leader at camp in those same Bible studies, silly skits, and fun camp songs.

Knowing that Christ has given His life for you and that we are justified by His grace through faith brings joy even in the most difficult of circumstances. As Russia's war on Ukraine continues, we hope to bring this joy to the people of Ukraine. We do so through our camps, our worship services for people with special needs, our weekly visits to the local cerebral palsy center and school for children with hearing disabilities.

During Christmas, we brought gifts to Ukrainian children in their homes while dressed as Santa Claus. We also gathered humanitarian aid and Christmas gifts to take to people in need who live near the war front.

Thank you for all of your prayers and support for us as we look to bring Jesus and good tidings of great joy for Ukraine this winter. †

Rev. Scott Yount and his wife Lena serve as missionaries to Ukraine through the Joy 4 Ukraine Ministry.



# Church News



**Top Left:** Rev. Michael Hartley with his wife, Kierstin, and daughter, Wren. Submitted photo.

**Top Right:** Present for the ordination service: (front row) Rev. David Schmidt (LCMS retired), Presiding Pastor Rev. Dr. Cary Larson, Rev. Michael Hartley, and CH (COL) William Draper, KY Army National Guard State Chaplain, (back row) Rev. Dr. Chris Caughey, Rev. Micah Schmidt (pastor at St. John's Lexington), Rev. Brad Bowlds (LCMS ordained, serves as an elder at St. John's Lexington), Rev. Dean Stoner. Submitted photo.

## Hartley Ordained as National Guard Chaplain

By Chaplain Michael Hartley

*Ordinator:* Herein you hear that we bishops—i.e., presbyters and pastors—are called not to watch over geese or cows, but over the congregation God purchased with His own blood that we should feed them with the pure Word of God and also be on guard lest wolves and sects burst in among the poor sheep. This is why He calls it a good work. Also, in our personal conduct we should live decently and honorably and rule our house, wife, children, and servants in a Christian way. Are you now ready to do this?

*Ordinand:* Yes.<sup>1</sup>

These words are Luther's, from his Rite of Ordination, and they put into perspective, the holy vocation of clergy. In some ways, the job is much the same as that of a shepherd, goose keeper or cattle herder: to provide for, protect and guide those under his care. But in one way the calling is different, holy. It is holy because the

pastor (or chaplain) deals not in the field of flesh and blood, but in the spiritual realm, battling sin, death, and the power of the devil, delivering the good gifts won by the work of Jesus Christ.

I was ordained on December 16, 2023, at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Augusta, KY, by Presiding Pastor Rev. Dr. Cary Larson, as a Chaplain in the Kentucky Army National Guard.

In the ancient practice, brothers in faith laid hands on me, and prayed that I might feed the sheep God places under my care.

It is an honor to join this brotherhood of faithful men, called by God to this particular purpose. Would you pray for me, my ministry to men and women in uniform, and for all who wear the stole or collar, bearing the weight of Christ's yoke for you? †

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 53: *Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 125.





# WOL Hosts Advent Brunch in Gibsonburg, Ohio



**Top:** Tables decorated for the food and fellowship during the Advent Brunch held at First English Lutheran Church, Gibsonburg, OH.



**Right:** Claudia is a support dog with the Lutheran Church Charities "Paws for Christ" Support Dog Ministry.

Submitted photos.

On Saturday, December 9, 2023, the ladies of First English Lutheran Church of Gibsonburg, OH, hosted their Advent brunch. Over 70 women from the community attended this event, which was filled with great food and fellowship.

As part of the festivities, Nancy Borders from the Lutheran Church Charities "Paws for Christ" Support Dog Ministry gave a presentation on this important and caring work of bringing comfort to those in need. Joining us for the brunch was Claudia, one of the Support dogs. †

1. Rev. Dean Stoner, Administrative Assistant to The AALC
2. Rev. Jamie Strickler
3. American Lutheran Theological Seminary
4. Greater Heartland Region
5. Pastors during busy Lenten season
6. Rev. Carl Groh
7. For all Seminary Students
8. For Missionaries serving overseas
9. Rev. David Swarthout
10. Commission for Doctrine & Church Relations
11. Christ Lutheran Church, Chetek, WI
12. For those who are ill
13. Rev. Daniel Dapelo
14. That our churches do not drift away from Holy Scripture
15. Rev. Dale Zastrow
16. Churches teach the Lutheran Confessions
17. Faith Lutheran Church, Holstein, IA
18. Rev. Joseph Dapelo
19. Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Franklin, NC
20. For the Lord's prayer and explanation be taught
21. For the Ten Commandments and explanation be taught
22. Rev. Stephen Unger
23. Lutherans For Life
24. Hope Lutheran Church, Brighton, IA
25. Rev. Kevin Beard
26. Rev. John Morley
27. Commission for Higher Education
28. For the Creeds and their explanations be taught
29. The AALC Ministerium
30. For the difference between Law and Gospel be taught
31. Persecuted Christians



# April 2024

## PRAYER BOOKMARK

1. Rev. Edwin Mendivelso
2. For the Sacrament of the Altar be taught
3. Kongsvinger Lutheran Church, Oslo, MN
4. Rev. David Huskamp
5. For the Sacrament of Baptism and explanation be taught
6. Rev. Dr. Cary Larson, Presiding Pastor of The AALC
7. Rev. Dean Johansen
8. Gretchen Baker, *Evangel* Editor
9. Abiding Grace Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
10. To confess our sins of commission and omission
11. Christ Ev. Lutheran Church, Ellis, KS
12. New Congregations
13. Future Needs of ALTS
14. Rev. David M. Johnson
15. For all to repent of sins
16. Rev. Andrew Virkus
17. Women of L.I.F.E. Groups
18. For all to become baptized children of God
19. Rev. Iestyn ap Hywel Jones
20. That the chief articles of our faith be taught
21. The Sending Place
22. Rev. Scott Yount
23. Rev. Eric Ishimaru
24. We understand what Sanctification means
25. We understand what Justification means
26. National & Local Governments
27. Christ Lutheran Church, Germantown, MD
28. Rev. Steven Wadle
29. To understand our freedom in Christ
30. Rev. Wayne Wilken

## In Memoriam: Gloria M. Conrad



Gloria M. Conrad, age 93, of Bloomington, MN, went home to be with the Lord on December 29, 2023. Gloria was one of the first office secretaries of The American Association of Lutheran Churches, having served under the leadership of Presiding Pastor Thomas Aadland.

Gloria's children, Tim and Deb, indicated three things that could be learned from their mother's life: caring for others, respect for everyone, and awareness of the needs of others around her.

Funeral service was held on Wednesday, January 3, 2024, at Minnesota Valley Lutheran Church, Lakeville, MN, with Rev. Tom Olson officiating. She was laid to rest in Black Oak Lake Cemetery, Montevideo, MN.

"One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple," (Ps 27:4). †

### The 29th General Convention of The American Association of Lutheran Churches

Mark your  
calendar  
and plan to  
attend!



*Reconciled  
Through Christ*

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

#### Keynote Speakers

The Rev. Heath Curtis

The Rev. Dr. Nathan Meador

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# Christ the Ray of Hope Church HOSTS REFORMATION PARTY

In a vibrant display of faith, community, and delicious cuisine, members of Christ the Ray of Hope gathered in Albuquerque October 2023 to celebrate Reformation Sunday. The Reformation Party, an annual tradition for the congregation, commemorates the Reformation movement initiated by Martin Luther in the 16th Century, emphasizing the teachings of the Bible and the core tenets of the Christian faith. Christ the Ray of Hope took the opportunity to come together in a time joyous celebration.

The event kicked off with a spirited service, where the congregation reflected on the historical significance of the Reformation and its enduring impact on their faith. Rev. John Morley delivered an inspiring sermon, reminding attendees of the importance of unity and steadfastness in the face of challenges.

Following the service, the members and guests made a short trip to the church's fellowship hall that was transformed into a lively gathering, filled with laughter and the tempting aroma of traditional German dishes. Bratwurst, sauerkraut, and German potato salad took center stage, satisfying the palates of attendees with a delicious nod to the cultural roots of the Lutheran tradition. The spread also featured cabbage dishes, strudel, and Kinder Punch – a staple in many German celebrations. From delectable pastries to homemade treats, the dessert table became a focal point of the celebration, symbolizing the sweetness of community and shared faith.

The atmosphere was one of camaraderie, with members of all ages engaging in lively conversations, exchanging stories, and

fostering connections that extend beyond the walls of the church. The Reformation Party at Christ the Ray of Hope exemplified the church's commitment to both spiritual growth and building a close-knit community. The many smiling faces and hands that went into serving and preparing for this occasion was awe inspiring and a testament to the Body of Christ working together.

As the event drew to a close, Pastor John expressed gratitude for the strong sense of unity and fellowship that permeated the celebration. "Our Reformation Party is not just a historical observance; it's a reminder of our shared commitment to the teachings of Christ and the enduring strength of our community," remarked Pastor John.

The success of the Reformation Party at Christ the Ray of Hope in Albuquerque, NM, stands as a testament to the church's dedication to its confessional and orthodox Lutheran heritage, fostering a spirit of togetherness that extends far beyond the celebration itself! †



**Left:** The Women of L.I.F.E. dressed for the Reformation Party and ready to serve traditional German dishes. **Middle and right:** The Fellowship Hall at Christ the Ray of Hope Lutheran Church, Albuquerque, NM, was decorated for the Reformation festivities. Submitted photos.

## The American Association of Lutheran Churches

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## UPCOMING EDITIONS...

Please be in prayer for and consider contributing to these upcoming editions.

**2024 Overarching theme: What Does It Mean To Be a Lutheran in The 21st Century?**

May/June: The Lutheran Distinction (*deadline Mar. 1*)

Jul/Aug: Lutheran Worship (*deadline May 1*)

Sept/Oct: Convention Edition (*deadline July 1*)

Nov/Dec: The Lutheran Home (*deadline Sept. 1*)

### Church News:

*The Evangel* welcomes submissions of what's happening in your congregation. To submit content, **email the editor** Gretchen Baker: [theevangel@taalc.org](mailto:theevangel@taalc.org)

**Or mail:** St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church, Attn: Gretchen Baker  
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