

THIS WE BELIEVE

A Statement of Belief of
the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
and Faith Lutheran Church - Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

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Christ's Love, Our Calling.

I. GOD AND HIS REVELATION

1. We believe that there is only one true God (John 17:3). He has made himself known as the Triune God, one God in three persons. This is evident from Jesus' command to his disciples to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Whoever does not worship this God worships a false god, a god who does not exist, for Jesus said, "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him" (John 5:23).
2. We believe that God has revealed himself in nature, for "the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Ps. 19:1). "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made" (Rom. 1:20). So there is no excuse for the atheist. However, we have in nature only a partial revelation of God and one that is wholly insufficient for salvation.
3. We believe that God has given us the full revelation of himself in his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. "No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18). Particularly has God revealed himself in Jesus as the Savior God, who "so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).
4. We believe that God has given the Holy Scriptures to proclaim his grace in Christ to man. In the Old Testament God repeatedly promised his people a divine Deliverer from sin, death, and hell. The New Testament proclaims that this promised Deliverer has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The Scriptures testify of Christ. Jesus himself says of the Scriptures that they "testify about me" (John 5:39).
5. We believe that God gave us the Scriptures through men whom he chose, using the language they knew and the style of writing they had. He used Moses and the prophets to write the Old Testament in Hebrew (some portions in Aramaic) and the evangelists and apostles to write the New Testament in Greek.
6. We believe that in a miraculous way that goes beyond all human investigation God the Holy Spirit inspired these men to write his Word. These "men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). What they said, was spoken "not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13). Every thought they expressed, every word they used was given them by the Holy Spirit by inspiration. St. Paul wrote to Timothy: "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). We therefore believe in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, that is, a word-for-word inspiration. This, however, is not to be equated with mechanical dictation.
7. We believe that Scripture is a unified whole, true and without error in everything it says, for our Savior said: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). We believe that it, therefore, is the infallible authority and guide for everything we believe and do. We believe that it is fully sufficient, clearly teaching us all we need to know for salvation, making us "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15), equipping us for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17). No other revelations are to be expected.
8. We believe and accept Scripture on its own terms, accepting as factual history what it presents as history, recognizing a metaphor where Scripture itself indicates one, and reading as poetry what is evident as such. We believe that Scripture must interpret Scripture, clear passages throwing light on those less easily understood. We believe that no authority, be it man's reason, science or scholarship, may stand in judgment over Scripture. Sound scholarship will faithfully search out the true meaning of Scripture without presuming to pass judgment on it.
9. We believe that the three ecumenical creeds, the Apostles' the Nicene and the Athanasian, as well as the Lutheran Confessions as contained in the Book of Concord of 1580 give expression to the true doctrine of Scripture. Since the doctrines they confess are drawn from Scripture alone, we feel ourselves bound to them in our faith and life. Therefore all preaching and teaching in our churches and schools must be in harmony with these confessions.

10. We reject any thought that makes only part of Scripture God's Word, that allows for the possibility of factual error in Scripture, also in so-called non-religious matters (for example, historical, geographical).
11. We reject all views that fail to acknowledge the Holy Scriptures as God's revelation and Word. We likewise reject all views that see in them merely a human record of God's revelation as he encounters man in history apart from the Scripture, and so a record subject to human imperfections.
12. We reject the emphasis upon Jesus as the Word of God (John 1:1) to the exclusion of the Scriptures as God's Word.
13. We reject every effort to reduce the confessions contained in the Book of Concord to historical documents that have only relative confessional significance for the church today. We likewise reject any claim that the church is bound only to those doctrines in Scripture that have found expression in these confessions.

This is what Scripture teaches about God and his revelation. This we believe, teach and confess.

II. CREATION, MAN AND SIN

1. We believe that the universe, the world and man came into existence in the beginning when God created heaven and earth and all creatures (Gen. 1 and 2). Further testimony of this event is found in other passages of the Old and New Testaments (for example, Exod. 20:11; Heb. 11:3). All this happened in the course of six normal days by the power of God's almighty word when he said, "Let there be."
2. We believe that the Bible presents a true and historical account of Creation.
3. We believe that God created man in his own image (Gen 1:26), that is, holy and righteous. Man's thoughts, desires and will were in full harmony with God (Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24) and he was given the capacity to "subdue" God's creation (Gen. 1:28).
4. We believe that man lost this divine image when he yielded to the temptation of Satan and disobeyed God's command. This brought upon him the judgment of God: "You will surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Since that time mankind is conceived and born in sin (Ps. 51:5), is inclined to all evil (Gen. 8:21), and as "flesh gives birth to flesh" (John 3:6). Being dead in sin (Eph. 2:1), man is unable to reconcile himself to God by his own efforts and deeds.
5. We reject the theories of evolution as an explanation of the origin of the universe and man, and all attempts to interpret the scriptural account of Creation so as to harmonize it with such theories.
6. We reject interpretations that reduce the first chapters of Genesis to a narration of myths or parables or poetic accounts that are not factual history.
7. We reject all views that see inherent goodness in man, that consider his natural bent only a weakness which is not sinful, and that fail to recognize his total spiritual depravity (Rom. 3:9-18).

This is what Scripture teaches about Creation, Man and Sin. This we believe, teach and confess.

III. CHRIST AND REDEMPTION

1. We believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, who was with the Father from all eternity (John 1:1,2). In the fullness of time he took a true and complete, yet sinless, human nature to himself (Gal. 4:4) when he was

conceived as a holy child in the Virgin Mary through a miracle of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). The angel testified, "What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:20). Jesus Christ is that unique person in whom the true God and a true human nature are inseparably united in one, the holy God-man, Immanuel.

2. We believe that he at all times possessed the fullness of the Deity, all divine power, wisdom and glory (Col. 2:9). This was evident at times when he performed miracles (John 2:11). But while he lived on earth, he took on the form of a servant, humbling himself by laying aside the continuous and full display and use of his divine characteristics. During this time we see him living as a man among men enduring suffering, and humbling himself to the shameful death on the cross (Phil. 2:7,8). We believe that he rose again from the grave with a glorified body, ascended and is exalted on high to rule with power over the world, with grace in his church, with glory in eternity (Phil. 2:9-11).
3. We believe that Jesus Christ, the God-man, was sent by the Father to humble himself for the redemption of mankind and that he was exalted as evidence that his mission was accomplished. Jesus came to fulfill the Law (Matt. 5:17), so that by his perfect obedience all men should be accounted righteous (Rom. 5:18,19). He came to bear "the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6), ransoming us by his sacrifice for sin on the altar of the cross (Matt. 20:28). We believe that he is the God-appointed substitute for man in all of this: his righteousness is accepted by the Father as our righteousness, his death for sin as our death for sin (2 Cor. 5:21). We believe that his resurrection gives full assurance that God has accepted this atonement for all (Rom. 4:25).
4. We believe that in Christ God reconciled the "world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19), that Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The mercy and grace of God are all-embracing; the reconciliation through Christ is universal; the forgiveness of sins has been gained as an accomplished fact for all men. Because of the substitutionary work of Christ, God has justified that is, declared the verdict of "not guilty" upon all mankind. This forms the firm, objective basis for the sinner's assurance of salvation
5. We reject any teaching that limits the work of Christ as to either its scope or its completeness, thereby failing to recognize the universality of redemption or the full payment of the ransom.
6. We reject the views which see in the Gospel accounts the church's proclamation and interpretation of Jesus Christ rather than a true account of what actually happened in history. We reject the attempts to make the historicity of events in Christ's life, such as his virgin birth, his miracles or his bodily resurrection, appear unimportant or even doubtful. We reject the attempts to stress a "present encounter with the living Christ" in such a way that Jesus' redemptive work in the fullness of time, as recorded in Scripture, would lose its importance.

This is what Scripture teaches about Christ and redemption. This we believe, teach and confess.

IV. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

1. We believe that God has justified, that is, declared all sinners righteous in his eyes for the sake of Christ. This is the central message of Scripture upon which the very existence of the church depends. It is a message relevant to people of all times and places, of all races and social strata, for "the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men" (Rom. 5:18). All need justification before God, and Scripture proclaims that all are justified, for "the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men" (Rom. 5:18).
2. We believe that the individual receives this free gift of forgiveness through Christ, not by works, but only by faith (Eph. 2:8,9). Justifying faith is trust in Christ and his redemptive work. This faith justifies, not because of any inherent virtue, but only because of the salvation prepared by God in Christ, which it embraces (Rom. 3:28; 4:5). On the other hand, although Jesus died for all, Scripture tells us that "whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). The unbeliever loses the forgiveness won for him by Christ.

3. We believe that man cannot work this justifying faith, or trust, in his own heart, because "the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him" (1 Cor. 2:14). In fact "the sinful mind is hostile to God" (Rom. 8:7). It is the Holy Spirit who moves the heart trustingly to recognize that "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12:3). This the Holy Spirit works by means of the gospel (Rom. 10:17). We believe, therefore, that man's conversion is entirely the work of God's grace. Rejection of the gospel is, however, wholly man's fault.
4. We believe that already in eternity God chose those individuals whom he would in time convert through the gospel of Christ and preserve in the faith to eternal life (Eph. 1:4-6; Rom. 8:29,30). This election to faith and salvation in no way was caused by anything in man, but shows how completely salvation is ours by grace alone (Rom. 11:5,6).
5. We reject every teaching that man in any way contributes to his salvation. We reject all efforts to present faith as a condition man must fulfill to complete his justification. We likewise reject any teaching which says that it does not matter what one believes so long as one has faith.
6. We reject any suggestion that the doctrine of justification by faith can no longer be meaningful to modern man, together with all attempts of man to justify himself or his existence before God.
7. We reject the false and blasphemous conclusion that those who are lost were elected by God to damnation, for God "wants all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4).

This is what Scripture teaches about justification by faith. This we believe, teach and confess.

V. GOOD WORKS AND PRAYER

1. We believe that faith in Jesus Christ is a living force within the Christian that will invariably produce works which are pleasing to God. "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (Jas. 2:17). A Christian as a branch in Christ the Vine brings forth good fruit (John 15:5).
2. We believe that faith does not set up its own standards to determine what is pleasing to God (Matt. 15:9). True faith, instructed by the Word of God, delights to do only that which conforms to the holy will of God. It recognizes that God's will finds its fulfillment in perfect love, for "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:10).
3. We believe that these works which are fruits of faith must be distinguished from works of civic righteousness performed by unbelievers. When unbelievers perform works that outwardly appear as good and upright before men, these works are not good in God's sight, for "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6). While we recognize the value of mere civic righteousness for human society, we know that the unbeliever through his works of civic righteousness cannot even begin to do his duty to God.
4. We believe that in this world even the best works of a Christian are still tainted with sin. The flesh, the old Adam, still afflicts the Christian so that he fails to do the good he wants to do, and does the evil he does not want to do (Rom. 7:19). He must confess that all his righteousnesses are like filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). For the sake of Christ, however, these imperfect efforts of Christians are graciously considered holy and acceptable by our heavenly Father.
5. We believe that also a life of prayer is a fruit of faith. Confidently, through faith in their Savior, Christians address the heavenly Father in petition and praise, presenting their needs and giving thanks. Such prayers are a delight to our God, and he will grant our petitions according to his wisdom.
6. We reject every thought that the good works of Christians contribute toward gaining salvation.

7. We reject every attempt to abolish the unchanging law of God as an absolute standard by which to measure man's conduct.

8. We reject the view that man himself in every situation must determine what "love" demands. We recognize this as a device of Satan to destroy the knowledge of God's holy will and to undermine the consciousness of sin.
9. We reject any view that considers prayer a means of grace or that looks upon it as helpful simply because of its psychological effect upon the one who prays.
10. We reject the view that all prayers are acceptable to God, and we hold the prayers of all who do not know Christ to be vain babblings addressed to false gods.

This is what Scripture teaches about good works and prayer. This we believe, teach and confess.

VI. THE MEANS OF GRACE

1. We believe that God bestows all spiritual blessings upon sinners by special means, ordained by him. These are the means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacrament.
2. We believe that through the gospel of Christ's atoning sacrifice for sinners the Holy Spirit works faith in the heart of man, whose heart by nature is enmity against God. Scripture teaches that "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). This Spirit-wrought faith, or regeneration, brings about a renewal in man and makes of him an heir of eternal salvation.
3. We believe that also through baptism the Holy Spirit applies the gospel to sinful man, regenerating him (Titus 3:5) and cleansing him from all iniquity (Acts 2:38). The Lord points to the blessing of baptism when he promises, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). We believe that the blessing of baptism is meant for all people (Matt. 28:19), including infants, who are sinful (John 3:6) and therefore need the regeneration effected through baptism (John 3:5).
4. We believe that all who partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper receive the true body and blood of Christ "in, with and under" the bread and wine. This is true because, when the Lord instituted this sacrament, he said: "This is my body given for you.... This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:19,20). As we partake of his body and blood, given and shed for us, we by faith receive the comfort and assurance that our sins are indeed forgiven and that we are truly his own.
5. We believe that the Lord gave his Word and the sacraments to his disciples for a purpose. He commanded them, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). It is by these means that he preserves and extends the holy Christian Church throughout the world. We should therefore be diligent and faithful in the use of these divinely ordained means of grace in our own midst and in our mission efforts. These are the only means through which immortal souls are brought to faith and to salvation.
6. We reject any views that look for the revelation of the grace of God and salvation apart from the gospel as found in the Scriptures. We likewise reject the view that the law is a means of grace.
7. We reject all teachings that see in the Sacrament of the Altar nothing more than signs and symbols for faith, thereby denying that Christ's true body and blood are received in the Lord's Supper.
8. We reject the claim that unbelievers and hypocrites do not receive the true body and blood of Jesus in the sacrament, as well as the view that to eat the body of Christ in the sacrament is nothing else than to receive Christ spiritually by faith. We reject the view that the body and blood of Christ are present in the sacrament through the act of consecration as such, apart from the reception of the elements.

9. We reject the teaching that the real presence of Jesus' body and blood in the Sacrament means merely that the person of Christ is present in his supper even as he is present in the Gospel.

This is what Scripture teaches about the means of grace. This we believe, teach and confess.

VII. THE CHURCH AND ITS MINISTRY

1. We believe that there is one holy Christian church, which is the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16) the body of Christ (Eph. 1:23; 4:12). The members of this one church are all those who are "the sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26). Whoever believes that Jesus died for his sin and rose again for his justification (Rom. 4:25) belongs to Christ's church. The church, then consists only of believers, or saints, whom God accepts as holy for the sake of Jesus' imputed righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). These saints are scattered throughout the world. Every true believer, regardless of the nation or race or church body to which he belongs, is a member of the holy Christian church.
2. We believe that the holy Christian church is a reality, although it is not an external, visible organization. Because "man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7), only the Lord knows "those who are his" (2 Tim. 2:19). The members of the holy Christian church are known only to God; we cannot distinguish between true believers and hypocrites. The holy Christian church is therefore invisible and cannot be identified with any one church body or the sum total of all church bodies.
1. We believe that the presence of the holy Christian church nevertheless can be recognized. Wherever the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are administered, the holy Christian church is present, for through the means of grace true faith is produced and preserved (Isa. 5:10,11). Moreover, where these means are in use, we are confident that the church is present, for the Lord has entrusted them only to his church of believers (Matt. 28:19,20). The means of grace are therefore called the marks of the church.
2. We believe that it is the Lord's will that Christians gather together for mutual edification and spiritual growth (Heb. 10:24,25) and for carrying out the whole of the Lord's commission (Mark 16:15). Since these visible gatherings (for example, congregations, synods) confess themselves to the marks of the church and make use of them, they are called churches. They bear this name, however, only because of the true believers present in them (1 Cor.1:2).
3. We believe that the holy Christian church is one, united by a common faith, for all true believers have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Eph. 4:5,6). Since this is a unity of faith in the heart, it is seen only by God.
4. We believe that God bids us on our part to acknowledge oneness in faith among God's saints on earth only as they by word and deed reveal (confess) the faith of their hearts. Their unity becomes evident when they agree in their confession to the doctrine revealed in Scripture. We believe, furthermore, that the individual through his membership in a church body confesses himself to the doctrine and practice of that body. To assert that unity exists where there is no agreement in confession is to presume to look into man's heart. This only God can do. It is not necessary that all agree on matters of church ritual or organization. About these the New Testament gives no commands.
5. We believe that those who have become evident as united in faith will give recognition to their fellowship in Christ and seek to express it as occasion permits. They may express their fellowship by joint worship, by joint proclamation of the gospel, by joining in Holy Communion, by joint prayer by joint church work. We believe that we cannot practice religious fellowship with those whose confession reveals that error is taught or tolerated, supported or defended. The Lord bids us keep away from persistent errorists (Rom. 16:17,18).

6. We believe that every Christian is a priest and king before God (1 Pet. 2:9). All believers have direct and equal access to the throne of grace through Christ, our Mediator (Eph. 2:17,18). To all believers God has given the means of grace to use. All Christians are to declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Pet. 2:9). In this sense all Christians are ministers of the gospel.

7. We believe that it is the will of God that the church in accordance with good order (1 Cor. 14:40) call qualified men (1 Tim. 3) into the public ministry. They are to preach the Word and administer the sacraments publicly, that is, not merely as individuals who possess the universal priesthood, but by order and in the name of fellow Christians. These men are the called servants of Christ, ministers of the gospel, and not lords over God's heritage, his believers (1 Pet. 5:3). Through its call the church in Christian liberty designates the place, form and scope of service. We believe that when the church calls men into this public ministry, it is the Lord himself acting through the church (Acts 20: 28).
8. We reject any attempt to identify the holy Christian church with an outward organization, and likewise any claim that the church must function in the world through specific organizational forms.
9. We reject any views that see in the church, as the body of Christ, an extension of Christ's incarnation.
10. We reject as false ecumenicity any views that look for the true unity of the church in some form of external or organizational union, and we oppose all movements toward such union made at the expense of confessional integrity.
11. We reject the contention that religious fellowship may be practiced without confessional agreement.

This is what Scripture teaches about the church and its ministry. This we believe, teach and confess.

VIII. THE CHURCH AND THE STATE

1. We believe that not only the church, but also the state, that is, all governmental authority, has been instituted by God. "The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Rom. 13:1). Christians will, therefore, for conscience' sake be obedient to the government that rules over them (Rom. 13:5) unless the government commands them to disobey God (Acts 5:29).
2. We believe that God has given to each, the church and the state, responsibilities that do not conflict with one another. To the church the Lord has assigned the responsibility of calling sinners to repentance, of proclaiming forgiveness through the cross of Christ, of encouraging believers in their Christian living. The purpose is to lead the elect of God through faith in Christ to eternal salvation. To the state the Lord has assigned the keeping of good order and peace, the arranging of all civil matters among men (Rom. 13:3,4). The purpose is "that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Tim. 2:2).
3. We believe that the only means God has given to the church to carry out its assigned purpose is his revealed Word, the Holy Scripture (Matt. 28:19,20). Only by preaching the law and the gospel, sin and grace, the wrath of God against sin and the mercy of God in Christ, will people be converted and made wise to salvation. We believe that the means given to the state to fulfill its assignment are civil law and force, set up and used according to the light of reason (Rom. 13:4). The light of reason also includes the natural knowledge of God, the inscribed law, and conscience.
4. We believe the proper relation is preserved between the church and the state and the welfare of all is properly served only when each, the church and the state, remains within its divinely assigned sphere and uses its divinely entrusted means. The church is not to exercise civil authority nor to interfere with the state as the state carries out its responsibilities. The state is not to become a messenger of the gospel nor to interfere with the Church in its preaching mission. The church is not to attempt to use the civil law and force in leading people to Christ. The

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state is not to seek to govern by means of the gospel. On the other hand, the church and the state may participate in one and the same endeavor as long as each remains within its assigned place and uses its entrusted means.

5. We reject any attempt on the part of the state to restrict the free exercise of religion.

6. We reject any views that look to the church to guide and influence the state directly in the conduct of its affairs.
7. We reject any attempt on the part of the church to seek the financial assistance of the state in carrying out its saving purpose.
8. We reject any views that hold that a citizen is free to disobey such laws of the state with which he disagrees on the basis of personal judgment.

This is what Scripture teaches about the church and the state. This we believe, teach and confess.

IX. JESUS' RETURN AND THE JUDGMENT

1. We believe that Jesus, true God and true man, who rose from death and ascended to the right hand of the Father, will come again. He will return visibly, in like manner as his disciples saw him go into heaven (Acts 1:11).
2. We believe that no one can know the exact time of Jesus' return. This knowledge is hidden even from the angels in heaven (Matt. 24:36). Nevertheless, our Lord has given us signs to keep us in constant expectation of his return. He has told us to take heed to ourselves and to watch lest that day come upon us unexpectedly (Luke 21:34).
3. We believe that at Jesus' return this present world will come to an end. "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:13).
4. We believe that when Jesus returns and his voice is heard throughout the earth, all the dead will rise and together with those still living appear before his throne of judgment. The unbelievers will be condemned to an eternity in hell. Those who by faith have been cleansed in the blood of Christ will be with Jesus forever in the blessed presence of God in heaven (John 5:28,29).
5. We reject every form of millennialism, since it has no valid Scriptural basis and leads Christians to set their hopes upon the kingdom of Christ as an earthly kingdom. We likewise reject as unscriptural any hopes that the Jews will all be converted in those final days, or that all people will ultimately enjoy eternal bliss.
6. We reject any denial of bodily resurrection and of the reality of hell.
7. We reject as contrary to the clear revelation of Scripture all attempts to interpret symbolically the New Testament facts of the end of the world, of Jesus' second coming, and of the judgment or to see these events taking place, not in the end of time, but concurrently with history.

This is what Scripture teaches about Jesus' return and the judgment. This we believe, teach and confess.