

## **We are a confessional Lutheran Synod**

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We normally think of the word “confession” as a sincere admission of sin or guilt. Every Sunday we confess our sins publicly to God and to each other.

But there is another important way to understand and use the word “confession.” As Christians, we confess our faith when we state publicly what we believe. Early Christians confessed their faith boldly in the face of fierce opposition and even persecution. Throughout the centuries, as false teachers attempted to distort the truth of God’s Word, Christians carefully and prayerfully confessed what they believed.

In the early centuries of the Christian church, confessions—or creeds—were written to summarize the truth of Scripture in opposition to those who were distorting or misunderstanding biblical truth. The Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds were developed for this purpose.

Martin Luther did not intend to begin a new church; he wanted to reform the church by returning its teachings to the teachings of the Bible. When that proved to be impossible, Lutherans saw the need to state clearly what they believed. During Luther’s life and in the decades after his death, he and others wrote what have come to be known as the Lutheran Confessions. Some of these confessions, such as Luther’s Large and Small Catechism, were intended as summaries of Christian doctrine for instructional purposes. Others, such as the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, the Smalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord, were written to state clearly the scriptural teachings of the Lutheran church in contrast to the false teachings of other churches at the time.

Our Wisconsin Synod is a confessional Lutheran church. Every pastor and teacher in our synod publicly vows to remain faithful, without reservation, to the teachings of Scripture as summarized in the three ecumenical creeds and in the six Lutheran confessions. New confirmands do the same.

What makes a Lutheran synod confessional? It does the following:

- Believes that the truth of God’s Word, as revealed in Scripture and summarized in the confessions, does not change.
- Stands on the Bible’s foundational teaching that we are saved by God’s grace alone, through faith in Christ alone. It recognizes that the blessings of faith come

only by the Holy Spirit's working through the gospel proclaimed in God's Word and in the sacraments.

- Understands and applies the clear distinction between law and gospel. A confessional Lutheran church proclaims God's law in all its stark bluntness and God's gospel in all its amazing beauty.
- Values the rich heritage of doctrine and worship that God has preserved to us through the wisdom, courage, and creativity of those who have gone before us.
- Celebrates the freedom that God has given us in the gospel. It is careful to avoid any hint of legalism that imposes rules where God has not. It avoids misusing the freedom in a way that does not show Christian love for the other members of the body of Christ. It recognizes that often the most faithful exercise of our Christian freedom is when we willingly choose not to exercise that freedom out of love and concern for others.

Not every Lutheran church body today is a confessional Lutheran church. Some have chosen not to be. Others claim to be confessional, but their teachings and practices do not reflect it. By God's grace, WELS is still a confessional Lutheran church. It's who we are. It is, by God's grace, what we will remain.

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