

# UPDATE TO THE **EXPLANATION** OF THE Small Catechism



The LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR)

April 2015



## **Q: Why do we need a new Catechism?**

**A:** We aren't preparing a new Catechism, or even revising the old one. *Luther's Small Catechism* as we've known and used it for decades will not change at all. The six chief parts, the questions and answers that Luther wrote explaining each of them and the familiar English translation of those materials — none of that will change.

## **Q: So what is being updated?**

**A:** This project will only update further explanations of the material Luther wrote in the Small Catechism. In the Missouri Synod, we have traditionally put *Luther's Small Catechism* together with additional questions and answers and Bible verses to support the answers. In that way we have addressed new questions and topics facing new generations.

## **Q: Why now?**

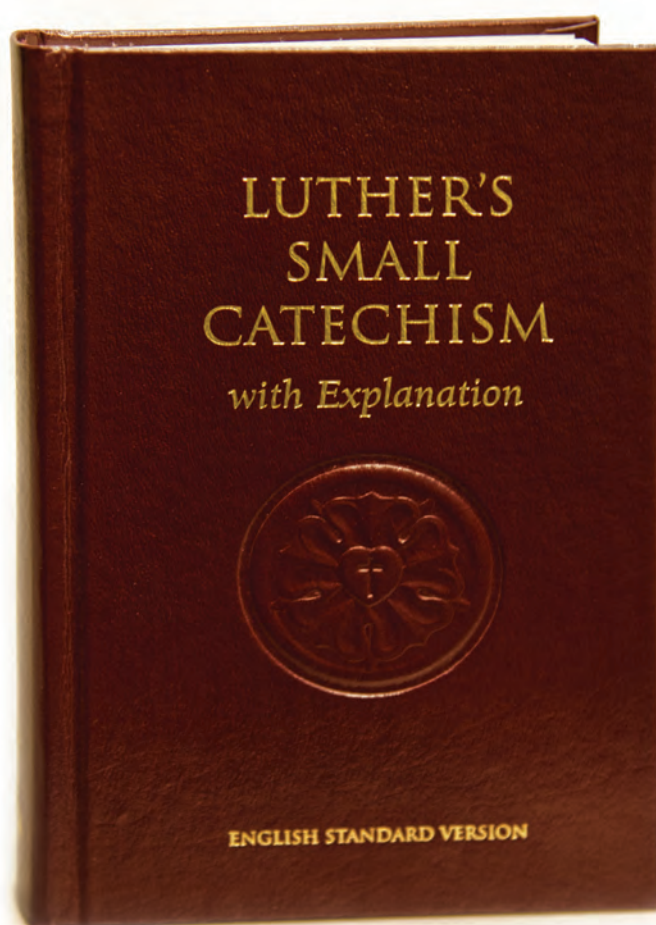
**A:** The Explanation of the catechism was last revised in 1991. According to the 2013 convention Resolution 3-13A, adopted by an overwhelming vote of 913-7, "many changes in the understanding of morals, civil law and natural law in church and society" have occurred since then that call for updating the Explanation.

## **Q: Has so much changed in the past 25 years?**

**A:** Our society and culture have changed in dramatic ways in the last 20-25 years. We are experiencing momentous changes in how we communicate — digital communication is replacing direct, person-to-person ties and is leading to less involvement in traditional groups, including churches. America is increasingly diverse not only in race and ethnicity, but also in worldviews and religions. Specific changes contradict Christian beliefs and values: same-sex marriage, over-the-counter abortion pills, "assisted suicide," and atheist hostility toward Christian beliefs and values. You can see why the Synod said that our Catechism needs to address these things for the sake of people young and old, both within and outside the church.

## **Q: You say, "young and old," but isn't the Small Catechism for kids?**

**A:** Certainly the Small Catechism has been used primarily to instruct young people in the Synod's past, but today many adults who are joining our churches have never studied basic beliefs. We need an instructional tool that will be usable for adults



as well as youth. Luther continued to study the Catechism — these basic beliefs — throughout his life.

## **Q: Who's in charge of this project? Who's doing it?**

**A:** The Synod asked this revision to be done by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), in concurrence with the Synod president. The CTCR and president's office are working together with Concordia Publishing House, both in field testing the proposed revisions and in the final publication of the materials. An ad hoc committee appointed by the CTCR and the president's office is responsible for doing the initial draft work, with the Rev. Dr. Charles Arand of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and the Rev. John Pless of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind. — two of the Synod's foremost experts on catechesis — serving as the primary drafters. What we're doing now is the first stage of field testing. We want people's input on the proposed template or framework for the new catechism.

## **Q: What is this new "template"? Is it totally different from the current version of the catechism?**

**A:** It's not totally different. In fact, we want to retain and preserve virtually all of the theological content of the current catechism, but present it in a somewhat "fresh" manner that hopefully will make it easier to use, understand and apply to real-life issues.

## **Q: The proposed update will make greater use of the Large Catechism, which isn't as familiar to most people. What's the idea behind this and how will it work?**

**A:** Martin Luther himself, the author of the Small Catechism, wrote the Large Catechism as a "companion volume." The Large Catechism is a tremendous tool for understanding and unpacking the brief, powerful words of the Small Catechism.

## **Q: Will there still be numbered "questions and answers" and printed-out Bible passages to read and memorize?**

**A:** Yes, but we also want to focus on key stories or narratives of Scripture that illustrate the central theological thoughts in each section of the catechism and bring them to life as only the memorable and powerful stories of the Bible can do.

## **Q: What are you asking for input on now?**

**A:** The Synod now has an online survey for anyone in the LCMS to provide feedback on updating the Explanation at [lcms.org/convention/catechismexplanationupdate](http://lcms.org/convention/catechismexplanationupdate). However, at this point, sample materials are being offered only to illustrate the proposed template or approach, not the specific content.

## **Q: What then? What next steps will follow?**

**A:** As sections of the Explanation are completed — on the Commandments, for example — they will be shared with the Synod in similar surveys. That will be the time for people to make suggestions about modifying answers, adding or subtracting Scripture verses and passages, and so forth. When all sections have been completed and field tested, and after final review and approval by the CTCR and the Synod president's office, the complete, proposed Explanation will be published as planned — hopefully in time for the 2017 celebration of the Reformation.

Tell us what you think. Take the survey at [lcms.org/convention/catechismexplanationupdate](http://lcms.org/convention/catechismexplanationupdate).

# Proposed Features

**The First Commandment**

YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS.

*What does this mean?*

We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

THE CENTRAL THOUGHT

We cannot live without putting our trust in someone or something else. Why? Because we did not create ourselves. We did not give ourselves life, so we must look somewhere else to find a full and meaningful life.

Where do people look to find such things as happiness, identity, security, meaning, and help? The answer may reveal their god, for a god is that to which we look for all good.

As Christians, we look for what we need in life and in death to the God who created and redeemed us. God both demands and desires that we look to Him for all that we need.

Read Matthew 6:25–34

*Note the different examples and reasons Jesus gives for us to put our trust in God.*

The **Central Thought** segment summarizes the specific section being studied (e.g., the First Commandment) and Luther’s brief explanation (“What does this mean?”), drawing on further Scripture and on *Luther’s Large Catechism*. This first element would have questions to lead into the content and would include a key portion of Scripture to illustrate the catechetical point.

*In what ways does God generously provide me with what I need for my daily life and salvation?*

A CLOSER READING OF THE SMALL CATECHISM

**19. What does it mean to have a god?**

It means to rely on something or someone that we believe will give us what we need, such as security, identity, purpose, and all other good things.

44 **Acts 17:16** In Athens St. Paul “saw that the city was full of idols.”

45 **Prov. 11:28** Whoever trusts in his riches will fall.

46 **Matt. 10:37** Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

**20. Why doesn’t God want us to have any other gods besides Him?**

God alone is our Creator. He is the only one who can provide us with what we need for time and eternity.

*Read Isaiah 42:5–8 and note why God will not share His glory with other gods.*

47 **Ps. 116:5** Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful.

48 **Is. 42:8** I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

**21. What does God require of us in the First Commandment?**

**A Closer Reading** is similar to the material in the current explanation, with questions and answers that give further explanation and biblical support for this section of the catechism. It would feature brief passages for memorization as foundational verses for doctrine together with additional narratives and psalms and, in some cases, references to the Lutheran Confessions.

# Take the Survey

Tell us what you think about our proposed features. Your input will help shape this update to the Explanation of the Small Catechism.

[lcms.org/convention/catechismexplanationupdate](https://lcms.org/convention/catechismexplanationupdate)



The updated Explanation will retain and preserve virtually all of the theological content of the current Small Catechism while presenting its content in a fresh manner to make it easier to use, understand and apply to real life. The four pages below are randomly selected to show proposed new features of the updated Explanation.

and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying His voice and holding fast to Him, for He is your life and length of days.

CONNECTIONS AND APPLICATIONS

The First Commandment in Exodus

**32. Read Exodus 20:1–3. Why do the commandments begin with the words, “I am the Lord Your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt”?**

These words identify Israel’s God, the one who rescued them from Egypt. The Creator who rescued Israel is the one who also rescued us from sin and death by sending His Son to die and rise for us. (Read John 3:16)

**33. Read Exodus 20:4. What are graven images?**

Graven images are statues and likenesses of something. This does not refer to art that glorifies the true God, but to statues of idols that were worshipped as gods. This verse is not a separate commandment but a further explanation of what it means not to have other gods.

**34. Read Exodus 20:5–6. Why does God make these threats and promises?**

God will not tolerate any other gods. No other “god” can give and sustain life. God threatens to punish sin so that we fear His wrath and do not break His commands. Even more, He promises to bless us so that we love and trust Him and willingly keep His commands.

(for example, syncretism and moralistic therapeutic deism). Read **Psalm 53:1; Psalm 14:1**.

*Lord God, author and source of all that is good, give us wisdom to fear Your wrath, strength to love You above all things, and faith to trust in Your promises alone that by Your grace we may serve You all our days and finally come to inherit Your heavenly kingdom; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen*

*Sing praise to God the highest good,  
The author of creation,  
The God of love who understood  
Our need for His salvation.  
With healing balm our souls He fills  
And ev’ry faithless murmur stills:  
To God all praise and glory!*

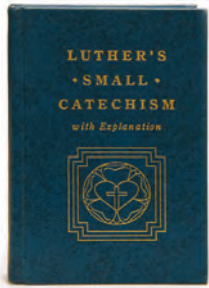
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**Connections and Applications** helps the reader see specific ways this section of the Catechism applies to our world today by explaining the practical importance of Christian teachings for our everyday life.

**Prayer and Hymn** provides a direct devotional connection, enabling the catechism to be used not only for instruction, but also as a devotional resource — a tool for spiritual contemplation, thanksgiving and petition.

# What’s Next

- The plan is to have a completed update of the Explanation by 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.
- In order for that to happen, extensive “field testing” — getting feedback from the pastors and congregations of the Synod along the way — is essential.
  - The first part of field testing is getting a synodwide reaction to the basic approach — the template — that we are proposing. That is what this survey is seeking. We need a positive reaction from the Synod’s members — congregations and called workers — on our four-element approach before we move “full steam ahead.”

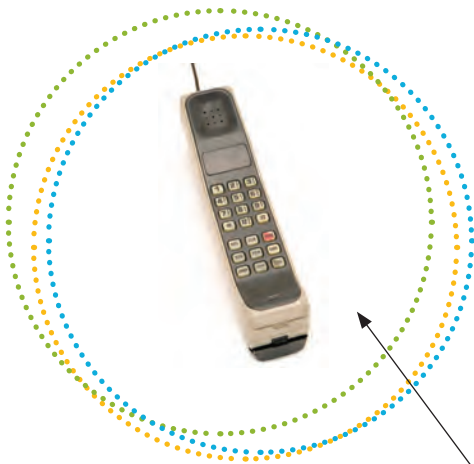


**1991** Nearly a quarter-century ago was the last time the Explanation of *Luther's Small Catechism* was updated. Our society and culture have changed in dramatic ways in the last 20-25 years. We are experiencing momentous changes in how we

communicate — digital communication is replacing direct, person-to-person ties and leading to less involvement in traditional groups, including churches. America is increasingly diverse — not only in race and ethnicity, but also in worldviews and religions.

There is tension between races and

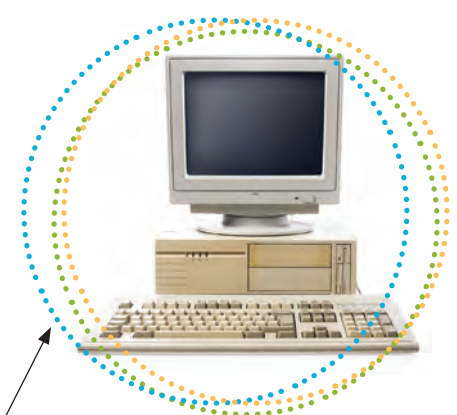
rising income disparity. Specific changes contradict Christian beliefs and values: same-sex marriage, over-the-counter abortion pills, “assisted suicide,” and atheism with its hostility toward churches, Christian beliefs and values. Many now doubt whether there is such a thing as “absolute truth.”



➤ Cell phones were the size of bricks, costly and not widely used.



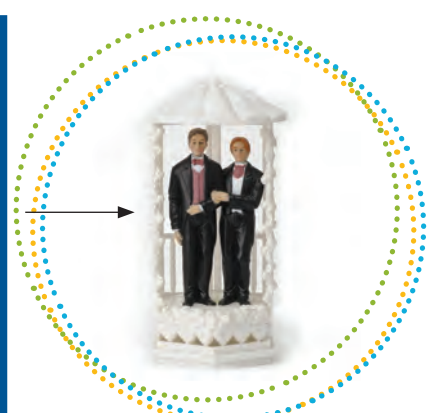
➤ The former Soviet Union was in the final stages of dissolution.



➤ There was no Worldwide Web, laptop, Facebook, Twitter or routine communication by email.

**1991**

**LOOK WHAT'S CHANGED IN 24 YEARS!**



➤ LGBT and same-sex marriage were not part of everyday American conversation.



➤ Militant Islam was not yet a global threat, the World Trade Center stood in New York, there was no Department of Homeland Security and there had been no major attack on American soil.



➤ Our nation's military was transitioning from Operation Desert Shield to Operation Desert Storm in response to Saddam Hussein's aggression against Kuwait, marking the beginning of decades-long military operations in Southwest Asia. American service members have been deploying for armed conflicts ever since — we remain in the longest protracted period of armed conflict in our nation's history.



➤ The Super Nintendo video game system was released in the U.S., and Sega published its first “Sonic the Hedgehog” video game.

Tell us what you think, take the survey: [lcms.org/convention/catechismexplanationupdate](https://lcms.org/convention/catechismexplanationupdate)

## Working to update the Explanation of *Luther's Small Catechism* — Your Drafting Committee Members Are:

**The Rev. Dr. Charles Arand**, dean of Theological Research and Publications; director of the Center for the Care of Creation; and Waldemar A. and June Schuette Chair in Systematic Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

**The Rev. Wally Arp**, pastor of St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Oviedo, Fla.

**The Rev. Thomas Egger**, assistant professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

**The Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer**, executive director of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR).

**Dr. Jan Lohmeyer**, commissioned educator at Lutheran High North, Houston.

**The Rev. John Pless**, assistant professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions and director of Field Education at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

**The Rev. Larry Vogel**, associate executive director of the CTCR.



The Rev. John Pless, left, makes a point at the recent meeting of the drafting committee as CTCR Executive Director Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer listens.