

# Lutheran World Federation

## AN INTRODUCTION AND EVALUATION FROM THE THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

### Introduction: History, Vision, Projects

**T**HE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION (LWF) describes itself as “a global communion of churches in the Lutheran tradition on a common journey of renewal” that strives to put faith into action “within and beyond the communion” with the guidance of God’s Word and Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

As of 2019, LWF member churches were about evenly divided between the global north and south.<sup>2</sup> According to its website, as of 2021, LWF membership included 148 Lutheran churches from 99 countries. These churches represent 77 million Christians.<sup>3</sup> “Churches that wish to join the LWF must formally accept the Federation’s doctrinal basis as outlined in the LWF Constitution.”<sup>4</sup> Member churches meet every six to seven years in an assembly. The Federation administration includes a president, seven vice-presidents and a finance chairperson. A council, with its elected General Secretary, governs the LWF between assemblies. In fiscal year 2019, the LWF had a budget of approximately 152 million euros with a revenue of 168 million euros.<sup>5</sup>

The Lutheran World Convention was founded in 1923, with the goal to “coordinate relief efforts after World War I and to promote fellowship and cooperation among Lutheran church bodies.”<sup>6</sup> The convention met for the first time in Eisenach, Germany, with 160 delegates from 22 nations, who explored and expressed their unity of faith and spiritual kinship.<sup>7</sup> At a meeting in 1929, the Lutheran World Convention stated its purpose: “In all its work of serving love the Lutheran World Convention and its committees shall, so far as the means are available, assist the needy and deserving Churches of the faith without respect to race, language, or political alignment.”<sup>8</sup>

In 1947, the Lutheran World Convention was reorganized as the Lutheran World Federation to help people in need, cooperate in mission efforts and theology, and respond to the challenge of the ecumenical movement. The 1947 LWF constitution stated, “The LWF shall be a free association of Lutheran churches. It shall have no power to legislate for the churches belonging to it or to interfere with their complete autonomy, but shall act as their agent in such matters as they assign to it.” The LWF did not, at that time, consider itself a “superchurch” that held authority over its member churches.<sup>9</sup> A desire to provide help to those in need in Europe after World War II meant that the LWF was more concerned with practical matters than with ecclesiological studies.

<sup>1</sup> The Lutheran World Federation, “About the LWF,” accessed December 17, 2021, [lutheranworld.org/content/about-lwf](https://lutheranworld.org/content/about-lwf).

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth G. Appold, “Is There a World Lutheranism? Accountability and Representation in Ecumenical Dialogue,” *Dialog* 58 (2019): 150.

<sup>3</sup> “About the LWF.”

<sup>4</sup> The Lutheran World Federation, “Member Churches,” accessed December 23, 2021, [lutheranworld.org/content/member-churches](https://lutheranworld.org/content/member-churches). The LWF constitution states: “The Lutheran World Federation confesses the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the only source and norm of its doctrine, life and service. It sees in the three Ecumenical Creeds and in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, especially in the unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism of Martin Luther, a pure exposition of the Word of God.” [lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2018/documents/lwf\\_constitution\\_en.pdf](https://lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2018/documents/lwf_constitution_en.pdf), accessed December 30, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> [lutheranworld.org/content/lwf-finances-2019](https://lutheranworld.org/content/lwf-finances-2019), accessed May 2, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Albert B. Collver III, “A Brief Status of Worldwide Lutheranism at the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation,” *Logia* 27, no. 3 (2018): 6.

<sup>7</sup> Gilbert A. Thiele, “The Lutheran World Federation,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 27 (1956): 445.

<sup>8</sup> Thiele, 446.

<sup>9</sup> Kjell Nordstokke, “The Ecclesiological Self-Understanding of the Lutheran World Federation: From ‘Free Association’ to ‘Communion of Churches,’” *The Ecumenical Review* 44 (1992): 481.

In the decades to come, controversy arose over the nature of the LWF as an “association of churches” and the role it had in exercising church discipline among its members. This came to be called the “Great Debate” and is best characterized by German theologian Peter Brunner’s argument that the LWF was an “ecclesiological problem.”<sup>10</sup> Brunner claimed that since the LWF agreed on the Gospel and the sacraments, it was a church according to Article 7<sup>11</sup> of the Augsburg Confession, but that if it chose not to discipline its members for theological error, then it was not faithfully carrying out its responsibilities as a church.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, this came to a head at the LWF general assembly in 1977, when the issue of apartheid was discussed in connection with the membership of white LWF churches in South Africa and Namibia. In 1984, the LWF constitution was amended to state that “the member churches ... understand themselves to be in pulpit and altar fellowship with each other.”<sup>13</sup> Considering itself a communion rather than a federation, the 1984 LWF World Assembly claimed for itself the authority of church discipline and “suspended the membership of two South African Lutheran churches that practiced apartheid.”<sup>14</sup> The earlier constitution had referred to the LWF as “a free association of Lutheran churches,” but in 1990, the constitution was amended to state: “The LWF is a communion of churches which confess the triune God, agree in the proclamation of the

word of God and are united in pulpit and altar fellowship.”<sup>15</sup> Because “the LWF defines itself as a ‘communion,’ all of the member churches are in communion with each other and are thereby linked sacramentally.”<sup>16</sup>

The LWF works toward the goal of Christian unity as they “engage with ecumenical and inter-faith partners.”<sup>17</sup> The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)*, prepared by the LWF and the Roman Catholic Church, was an LWF ecumenical document. The *JDDJ* agreement was adopted at the LWF assembly in 1997 and signed in 1999. The LWF believed that this document expressed “a common understanding of our justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ.” The remaining differences in the doctrine of justification were no longer considered as “the occasion for doctrinal condemnations.”<sup>18</sup>

The doctrinal direction of the LWF “has followed that of the secular progressive movement, particularly in social, moral, ethical, and justice issues.”<sup>19</sup> The LWF has taken liberal, progressive positions concerning the role of women, gender issues, same-sex marriage, and environmental and social justice issues.<sup>20</sup> As the LWF has adjusted its interpretation of Scripture to align itself with these issues, the Federation has moved away from historic Lutheran doctrinal positions.<sup>21</sup>

According to its vision statement, the LWF is a “communion in Christ living and working together for a just, peaceful, and reconciled world.” Their core values include dignity, justice, compassion, commitment,

<sup>10</sup> On this issue and its development, see Michael Root, “Affirming the Communion: Ecclesiological Reflection in the LWF,” in *From Federation to Communion: The History of the Lutheran World Federation*, ed. Hens Holger Schjørring, Prasanna Kumari, and Norman A. Hjelm (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 216–46.

<sup>11</sup> “It is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere” (AC VII 2–3; Kolb-Wengert, 43).

<sup>12</sup> Peter Brunner, “The Lutheran World Federation as Ecclesiological Problem,” *Lutheran World* (1960): 237–56. See also Hermann Sasse: “Is [the LWF] in a position to call upon its member churches to again take the Lutheran Confessions seriously? If it can do this, then it has a great task, and we will happily help it in this regard. If it is not in the position to do this, or it will not do this, then the cooperation of any truly confessional churches is senseless.” Sasse, “Altar Fellowship, Church Fellowship, & Federation,” in *Letters to Lutheran Pastors*, vol. 2: 1951–1956, ed. and trans. Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), 201. Hermann Sasse (1895–1976), a German theologian who spent the last part of his career as a seminary professor, was an informed, careful and engaged observer of the LWF since its inception in 1947. Several of his essays address the theological assumptions articulated in the earlier years of the LWF’s history which would become foundational for the organization’s increasing distance from Lutheran doctrine. See “For Further Reading and Study” for a selection of these works.

<sup>13</sup> Nordstokke, 485.

<sup>14</sup> Collver, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Nordstokke, 487.

<sup>16</sup> Appold, 149.

<sup>17</sup> The Lutheran World Federation, “Theology, Unity, Mission and Justice,” accessed December 24, 2021, [lutheranworld.org/content/theology-unity-mission-and-justice](http://lutheranworld.org/content/theology-unity-mission-and-justice).

<sup>18</sup> Collver, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Collver, 7.

<sup>20</sup> For instance, the LWF has developed theological studies and educational resources, such as “Gender: Herstories: Telling the Stories of Women Reformers,” “Transformative Masculinities,” “Loving Your Neighbor: Encouraging Constructive Interfaith Engagement,” “A Common Word: Buddhists and Christians Engage Structural Greed,” “The Church in the Public Space” and “God, Creation and Climate Change.”

<sup>21</sup> “The Lutheran World Federation remains a federation in which the ‘family’ of Lutheran churches finds its expression. What keeps together the LWF and its member churches is not the common confession, but family resemblances, historical facts.” Herman Sasse, “Inclusive Lutheranism” in *The Lonely Way*, ed. and trans. Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 2: 344.

respect for diversity, inclusion, participation, transparency and accountability.<sup>22</sup> The LWF states that their values are rooted in God's grace revealed in Jesus Christ and that they seek to promote dialogue "in order to build trust and peaceful coexistence among members of the world's different faith communities."<sup>23</sup>

The first phase of an LWF study, "We Believe in the Holy Spirit: Global Perspectives on Lutheran Identity," states: "Lutheran identity is rooted in the *solae* including the Word, the Trinitarian ecumenical creeds, Lutheran confessional documents (recognizing that some churches also recognize the Formula of Concord, Barmen Declaration, etc.) including the Catechisms with special emphasis here on the third article."<sup>24</sup> The study continues: "Being Lutheran describes a faithful way of being in the world that points to Christ as the revelation of God's love, while embracing the creative tension of ecumenical consensus, interfaith dialogue and interdisciplinary dialectic."<sup>25</sup>

The LWF addresses underlying causes of poverty and exclusion, working for a more equitable distribution of power, resources and opportunities. They believe that differences in history and culture shape theological understandings, as well as perspectives on moral and ethical questions. They are committed to enabling "the full and equitable participation of women, men, people of all ages and people with disabilities."<sup>26</sup> The LWF also offers "platforms for reflection and joint work on gender justice and women's empowerment, eco-theology and what it means to be church in the public space."<sup>27</sup>

Since 1995, the LWF has engaged in a dialogue with its member churches concerning family, marriage and sexuality issues, including a process called the "Emmaus Conversation." The LWF faces the challenge of differences of opinions among member churches about same-sex marriage and the ordination of women and homosexu-

als. In 2004, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania issued a statement, saying, "We object to legalization of same sex marriage ... We do not agree with those seeking to ordain homosexuals into the ministry of Word and Sacrament."<sup>28</sup> In contrast, the Church of Sweden stated that "the purpose of marriage is to support the mutual relationship between the spouses and provide a secure framework in which to bring up children. These needs also exist in relationships between people of the same sex."<sup>29</sup>

LWF efforts in gender justice focus on promoting human rights with an emphasis on women and girls and their full participation in church and society. The Federation's 2013 Gender Justice Policy was prepared to help its member churches achieve gender equality through measures that promote justice and dignity. The document explains that gender justice "is expressed through equality and balanced power relations between women and men and the elimination of the institutional, cultural and interpersonal systems of privilege and oppression that sustain discrimination."<sup>30</sup> The LWF has also produced webinars on transformative masculinity "to address the root of gender-based violence, to transform the intellectual and spiritual violence that shapes our ideas about what it means to be human and therefore our concepts of masculinity."<sup>31</sup>

The LWF Action for Justice unit focuses on human rights, climate justice, gender justice, and interfaith and peace-building. The Federation engages with national, regional and international human rights organizations and takes part in discussions with the United Nations Human Rights Council. The LWF also creates policy briefs concerning human rights issues in various countries.

The LWF seeks peace through conversation with religious leaders of various faiths and works with faith-based organizations. The Federation has also produced a number of publications concerning climate change, including "LWF Together Green and Just" (2012) and "Creation Not for Sale" (2017). The 2017 LWF assembly

<sup>22</sup> "About the LWF."

<sup>23</sup> The Lutheran World Federation, "Theological Studies," accessed December 22, 2021, [lutheranworld.org/content/theological-studies](https://lutheranworld.org/content/theological-studies).

<sup>24</sup> "Lutheran Identity Process Phase 1: Full Report and Lessons Learned," The Lutheran World Federation, 2020, [lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2021/documents/2020\\_dtmj\\_addis\\_ababa\\_lutheran\\_identity\\_consultation\\_a4\\_en.pdf](https://lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2021/documents/2020_dtmj_addis_ababa_lutheran_identity_consultation_a4_en.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> "Lutheran Identity Process Phase 1."

<sup>26</sup> The Lutheran World Federation, "Our Core Values," accessed December 17, 2021, [lutheranworld.org/content/our-core-values](https://lutheranworld.org/content/our-core-values).

<sup>27</sup> "Theology, Unity, Mission and Justice."

<sup>28</sup> Craig L. Nesson, "Three Theses on the Theological Discussion of Homosexuality in the Global Lutheran Communion," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 37, no. 3 (June 2010): 191.

<sup>29</sup> Nesson, 192.

<sup>30</sup> [lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DTPW-WICAS\\_Gender\\_Justice.pdf](https://lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DTPW-WICAS_Gender_Justice.pdf), accessed December 26, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> [lutheranworld.org/content/transformative-masculinities](https://lutheranworld.org/content/transformative-masculinities), accessed December 20, 2021.

passed a Resolution on the Commercialization and Commodification of Creation to encourage member churches in their teaching on human dignity and their relationship to creation.

### A Missouri Synod Evaluation

The LWF World Assembly in 1952 in Germany was the first to be attended by a president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, along with other LCMS representatives. The LCMS president and representatives, as well as some free churches and churches in fellowship with the Missouri Synod, did not attend the LWF communion service held that year at a local church.

At its 1956 convention, the LCMS declined membership in the LWF “because the synod determined that [the LWF] was not in fact a federation, but a church requiring doctrinal agreement and church fellowship ... The churchly character of the LWF as well as disagreements about the inspiration and inerrancy of Holy Scripture, about confessional subscription to the Lutheran Confessions, and the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ (among other things) prevented the Missouri Synod and many of the church bodies in fellowship with her from joining in the LWF.”<sup>32</sup> In this sense, the LCMS identified what it would take the Federation another 25 years to articulate: that the LWF was in essence a church.

The Missouri Synod did not sign the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, commenting in a 1999 report that “the foremost defect” of *JDDJ* was its acceptance of conflicting definitions of justification. “For Lutherans, justification is essentially forensic, that is, God declares the sinner righteous on account of and in Christ. Roman Catholics define justification as an internal transformation of the believer, a ‘process,’ which Lutherans place in the area of sanctification, about which too there are different understandings.”<sup>33</sup>

The 1965 document by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Theology of Fellowship*, addresses the issue of fellowship with other churches. Both unionism and separatism are viewed as equal dangers: “Unionism ignores genuine differences in doctrine, and treats them as though they were unimportant. ... Separatism ... sins against love and divides the church.”<sup>34</sup> Concerning cooperative work with other church bodies, the same document states: “Our Synod should clearly recognize that, in the case of necessary work on the local, national, or international level, where the faith and confession of the church are not compromised, and where it appears essential that the churches of various denominations should cooperate or at least not work at cross purposes, our churches ought to cooperate willingly to the extent that the Word of God and conscience will allow.”<sup>35</sup> At times, however, faith and confession may be compromised, as in association with the Lutheran World Federation, which calls itself a “communion” and considers its member churches to be “united in pulpit and altar fellowship.”<sup>36</sup>

In his explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed, Martin Luther writes that through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit “calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”<sup>37</sup> A 2009 document of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Church Relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, states: “In creating the church, the Holy Spirit works through external means. Thus Augsburg Confession Article 7 describes the true unity of the church as agreement ‘concerning the pure teaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments.’ It appends to the article the Apostle Paul’s description, ‘One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all...’ (AC 7, 2–4). This clarifies *how* the Holy Spirit establishes and maintains the unity of the church: He does so through the word of Christ as it is rightly proclaimed and as it is authentically made visible in the sacraments.”<sup>38</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Collver, 7. Here also note Hermann Sasse, writing in 1959 on the lack of confessional consensus in the LWF: “It has become obvious and was frankly admitted that in very important doctrines, such as, for example, the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, there exists no agreement between the Lutherans belonging to the LWF. The same is true of almost every doctrine of the Lutheran faith. There is no agreement on original sin, on justification, to say nothing of the doctrine of the inspiration and authority of the Holy Scripture.” Sasse, “The Crisis of Lutheranism,” in *Lonely Way*, 2: 269.

<sup>33</sup> Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Lutheran Perspective* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1999), 17, [files.lcms.org/dl/fj/90BD9722-8E11-4DCF-96D3-869B579EC336](https://files.lcms.org/dl/fj/90BD9722-8E11-4DCF-96D3-869B579EC336).

<sup>34</sup> Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Theology of Fellowship* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1965), 42, [files.lcms.org/wl/?id=IOuSqdlwJbkW41lGpnQIFzCR8FXRB8Z](https://files.lcms.org/wl/?id=IOuSqdlwJbkW41lGpnQIFzCR8FXRB8Z).

<sup>35</sup> *Theology of Fellowship*, 43.

<sup>36</sup> See footnote 12 in this document.

<sup>37</sup> *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 17.

<sup>38</sup> Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Church Relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2009), 3, [files.lcms.org/dl/fj/A6A26E11-5187-4795-8ED4-4F058316B534](https://files.lcms.org/dl/fj/A6A26E11-5187-4795-8ED4-4F058316B534).

The *Church Relations* document continues: “The proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments cannot be separated from the entire body of doctrine any more than the head can be separated from a body and survive. Therefore church fellowship *coram mundo* [before the world] always flows out of unity in confession.”<sup>39</sup> The LCMS does not share a “unity of confession” with the Lutheran World Federation, therefore we cannot share pulpit and altar fellowship.

The LCMS also disagrees with the LWF in its support for the ordination of women as pastors. As of 2016, 119 out of 145 LWF member churches allow the ordination of women. The organization itself considers the opening of ordained ministry to women part of its “ongoing reformation.”<sup>40</sup> When the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia, an LWF member, voted in 2016 to restrict ordination to men, the LWF declared that it was “deeply saddened and concerned” by their decision.<sup>41</sup> The Latvian church later joined the International Lutheran Council (ILC), which does not grant member status<sup>42</sup> to churches that ordain women, and in response the LWF issued a statement expressing their dissatisfaction: “Membership criteria in the ILC subject churches to a set of theological principles, commitments, and practices, several of which ‘are at odds with what LWF member churches hold in common.’”<sup>43</sup> The LCMS has repeatedly and categorically committed itself to the teaching that Scripture reserves the office of pastor for men (1 COR. 14:34–35; 1 TIM. 2:11–12; 3:1–7; TITUS 1:5–9), and thus women may not be ordained as pastors or carry out the distinctive functions of the pastoral office.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Church Relations in the 21st Century*, 4.

<sup>40</sup> [lutheranworld.org/news/more-80-percent-lwf-churches-ordain-women](http://lutheranworld.org/news/more-80-percent-lwf-churches-ordain-women), accessed May 2, 2022.

<sup>41</sup> [lutheranworld.org/news/deeply-saddened-by-latvian-church-decision-against-womens-ordination](http://lutheranworld.org/news/deeply-saddened-by-latvian-church-decision-against-womens-ordination), accessed May 2, 2022.

<sup>42</sup> The ILC, though not a “communion of churches” like the LWF, grants membership to participants that fall into three categories: 1. Members; 2. Associate Members; and 3. Others, including Observers, Recognized Organizations and Individuals. See [ilc-online.org/about-us/membership/](http://ilc-online.org/about-us/membership/), accessed May 2, 2022.

<sup>43</sup> [lutheranworld.org/news/lwf-responds-decision-lutheran-church-latvia](http://lutheranworld.org/news/lwf-responds-decision-lutheran-church-latvia), accessed May 2, 2022.

<sup>44</sup> The most recent LCMS affirmation of this came at its 2016 convention in the form of Resolution 5-14, “To Affirm the Biblical Teaching on Man and Woman in the Church.” See also Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesiastical Practice* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1985), 40–42, [files.lcms.org/dl/f/6CE2573A-4E8F-4EC8-A2B0-098BD1747124](http://files.lcms.org/dl/f/6CE2573A-4E8F-4EC8-A2B0-098BD1747124).

The LCMS affirms that shared work in matters of physical need, or cooperation in externals, is possible even where disagreement in doctrine exists.<sup>45</sup> However, the LWF’s unbiblical position on certain social and ethical issues has made such cooperation untenable. LWF theological and political advocacy for LGBTQ+ causes runs in direct opposition to Holy Scripture. The Scriptures are patently clear that God created humans as man and woman (GEN. 1:27; 2:21–23); that He instituted marriage as an indissoluble bond between man and woman alone (MATT. 19:1–12; MARK 10:1–12; 1 COR. 7:10–11); that He prohibits sexual intercourse outside the bonds of marriage (EX. 20:14; DEUT. 5:18; NUM. 5:11–31; MATT. 5:27–30), including between persons of the same sex (LEV. 18:22, 24; 20:13; ROM. 1:26–27; 1 COR. 6:8; 1 TIM. 1:10; JUDE 7); and that heterosexual marriage and procreation is the foundation for all human societies (GEN. 1:28; EPH. 5–6; COL. 3–4; 1 PETER 2–3). As is the case with the ELCA, explicit support for gay marriage, gay clergy or the appropriateness of alternative sexual lifestyles is at odds with the biblical view and must be rejected on theological grounds, thereby making work together on certain social matters nearly impossible. A 2010 LCMS Task Force said this of the ELCA’s views on homosexuality, and it applies even more strongly to the LWF’s advocacy of LGBTQ+ lifestyles: “These cooperative activities, however, are threatened by the sexuality decisions of the ELCA because, in some cases, the ELCA’s new affirmation of same-gender relationships may contradict understandings or goals that have enabled cooperative activities in the past.”<sup>46</sup> Church bodies that disagree about homosexuality or gender identity, for instance, cannot possibly provide spiritual care to families in distress without confronting the possibility — or even the probability — of contradicting each other’s firmly held beliefs on such fundamental, “first article” matters.

The Missouri Synod has expressed concern that some of its partner churches (in full pulpit and altar fellowship with the LCMS) retain their membership in the LWF. Details about this lack of confessional unity are expressed in Resolution 5-07, “To Clarify the Relation-

<sup>45</sup> Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Principles for Cooperation in Externals with Theological Integrity* (2010 Res. 3-03) (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2010), [files.lcms.org/dl/f/4C700277-664D-481A-B84A-2ECE2429562E](http://files.lcms.org/dl/f/4C700277-664D-481A-B84A-2ECE2429562E).

<sup>46</sup> Presidential Task Force, “Theological Implications of the 2009 ELCA Decisions” (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2010), 5, [files.lcms.org/f/1B7F7596-E3ED-46CE-8A5C-A800B5E447E5](http://files.lcms.org/f/1B7F7596-E3ED-46CE-8A5C-A800B5E447E5).

ship between LCMS Partner Churches and the Lutheran World Federation,” adopted by the Missouri Synod at its 2019 Convention:

WHEREAS, LWF is a proponent of women’s ordination, acceptance of the LGBT lifestyle, and the use of a higher critical approach to interpreting Scripture; and

WHEREAS, The LWF defines itself as a global communion of churches united in pulpit and altar fellowship (although many of our partner churches in the LWF do not acknowledge this pulpit and altar fellowship); and

WHEREAS, Some partner churches of the LCMS are members of the LWF, and as partner churches we are in full altar and pulpit fellowship with them; and

WHEREAS, These partner churches have each joined the LWF at various times and have remained in the LWF for different and complex reasons; therefore be it

*Resolved*, That the Office of the President engage in fraternal dialogue with partner churches regarding this concern and compile accurate information from them on their existing relationship to the LWF; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Office of the President report to the 2022 Synod convention with recommendations on addressing the relationship between partner churches and the LWF; and be it finally

*Resolved*, That the Synod in convention commend these partner churches for their commitment to the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions and exhort them to remain faithful in that confession.<sup>47</sup>

The Commission hopes this brief review of the Lutheran World Federation will provide the President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod with a helpful resource in advising our partner churches about the LWF and our concern over their joint membership with the LWF.

The Missouri Synod is not a member of the LWF. It holds membership in the International Lutheran Council. The ILC traces its roots to a series of meetings (beginning in 1952) initiated by leaders of confessional

Lutheran churches, eventually becoming known as the “International Lutheran Theological Conference.” Its present name was adopted in 1993. While not a church body, nor requiring pulpit and altar fellowship among its members, the ILC currently includes 39 member churches worldwide, in addition to four associate members, 16 observers and two registered organizations. It serves to promote confessional Lutheranism through joint educational ventures, outreach programs, theological study and conferences for its leaders. It also conducts a Lutheran Leadership Development Program, offering a certificate to leaders of ILC-affiliated churches.<sup>48</sup>

## Links and Websites

Lutheran World Federation  
[lutheranworld.org](http://lutheranworld.org)

Lutheran World Federation Constitution and Bylaws  
[lutheranworld.org/content/resource-lwf-constitution-and-bylaws](http://lutheranworld.org/content/resource-lwf-constitution-and-bylaws)

International Lutheran Council  
[ilc-online.org](http://ilc-online.org)

For reports by the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations on justification, church relations, gender dysphoria, the stewardship of creation and other topics, see:  
[lcms.org/about/leadership/commission-on-theology-and-church-relations](http://lcms.org/about/leadership/commission-on-theology-and-church-relations)

## For Further Reading and Study

**Bloomquist, Karen.** “Lutheran World Federation.” In *Encyclopedia of Martin Luther and the Reformation*. Vol. 1: A–L, edited by Mark A. Lamport, 476–78. Landam, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2017.

**Johnson, Kathryn L.** “Lutheran World Federation.” In *Dictionary of Luther and the Lutheran Traditions*, edited by Timothy J. Wengert et al., 462–65. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017.

**Nelson, E. Clifford.** *The Rise of World Lutheranism: An American Perspective*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982.

<sup>47</sup> Resolution 5-07, “To Clarify the Relationship between LCMS Partner Churches and the Lutheran World Federation,” *2019 Convention Proceedings* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod), 152–53.

<sup>48</sup> More information on the ILC may be found at [ilc-online.org](http://ilc-online.org).

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