



ONE BODY  
ONE SPIRIT  
ONE HOPE

THIRTEENTH ASSEMBLY  
THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION  
2023 • KRAKÓW, POLAND

# WELCOME TO POLAND





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An introduction to the host church and country

LWF Thirteenth Assembly  
Kraków, Poland  
13-19 September 2023



Kościół Ewangelicko-Augsburski  
w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej



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in collaboration with The Lutheran World Federation, 2023

Published by:  
The Lutheran World Federation  
– A Communion of Churches  
Route de Ferney 150  
P.O. Box 2100  
1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland

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00-246 Warszawa, Poland

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Layout: Stéphane Gallay

ISBN 978-2-940642-50-2

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Presiding Bishop Jerzy Samiec.  
Photo: Dariusz Bruncz

# PREFACE

It was with great determination, hope and joy that the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland (ECACP) invited The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) to hold its Thirteenth Assembly in Kraków. As the Assembly host church, we have put a lot of work into organizing this milestone gathering of the global LWF communion, and I hope that it will be a wonderful and unforgettable time for you and for us.

I am delighted to present to you this booklet *Welcome to Poland – An introduction to the host church and country*. It provides general information about the country and about ECACP, which is one of the founding member churches of the LWF. While we are considered a minority church in our regional context, we take pride in our strength through the valuable contribution of our members.

I find it extremely valuable that in this publication, you get to read brief statements from some of the people who belong to

ECACP. They share what it means to belong to the church and the tasks it faces. This is our way of giving you an alternative to meeting with Polish Lutherans, with their hopes, plans and expectations.

It is my sincere hope that the Assembly will make important, courageous and wise decisions that will affect not only Lutherans from all corners of the world but also the communities from which we come.

I invite you to discover the LWF Thirteenth Assembly host church and country through these pages, and I wish you a profound experience during your stay in Kraków and Poland.

*Presiding Bishop Jerzy Samiec  
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg  
Confession in Poland*



The city of Kraków.  
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert



# WELCOME TO KRAKÓW

## THE FORMER CAPITAL OF POLAND

The birth of Poland symbolically dates to 966 and the Baptism of Poland, when Duke Mieszko I adopted Christianity as the official religion of the new state.

The 16<sup>th</sup> century marked the so-called “Golden Age of the Republic,” the dynamic development of humanism, literature, architecture, and art from the Renaissance, as well as the Reformation period. It was a time of a tolerant and multicultural society, during which Poland developed legal solutions that were innovative on a European and worldwide scale, fostering peaceful coexistence and even cooperation between different faiths (1570 – the Sandomierz Agreement, and 1573 – the act of Warsaw Confederation).

In 1791, Poland became the first country in Europe and the second in the world (after the United States of America) to adopt a written constitution. However, between

1772 and 1795, as a result of the three partitions (gradual division of the Polish territory between Russia, Prussia, and Austria), the country disappeared from the world map for 123 years.

It was only at the end of the First World War (1914–1918) that Polish statehood was reborn: the independent Second Republic was established on 11 November 1918. In 1939, the Second World War broke out. Massive war crimes were committed during the German occupation of Poland, including the systematic extermination of the Jewish population, resulting in the extermination of some 6 million Jews from all over Europe, including around 3 million Polish Jews. The Soviets too committed numerous crimes, including mass deportations of populations of various groups to Siberia and executions of Polish prisoners of war and civilians. Despite the dangers, Poles engaged in conspiratorial activities and fought against the occupying forces.

When the war ended in 1945, Poland's borders were pushed westward and the country was incorporated into the Soviet sphere of influence. This started the period of belonging to the so-called communist bloc. The reconstruction of the country began, but the overall enthusiasm was marred by state seizures of property rights to land, businesses and capital, and an ideologization of social relations. Freedom of speech and of assembly was curtailed, and the communist authorities censored the media and restricted press freedom. They also launched a widespread campaign of repression against political opposition, trade union activists, intellectuals, artists, and the clergy.

In the 1950s and 1960s there were protests against the authorities, and the 1970 workers' protests were suppressed by the government's armed forces. It was out of this period that "Solidarność" was born, a movement that united different social groups and worked for political and economic freedom. The communists tried to contain this mass social movement by imposing martial law on 13 December 1981. Social tensions and a collapse of the economy led to talks between the authorities and opposition. The "Round Table" talks in 1989, resulted in an

agreement to partially free elections, a huge success for the opposition. The communists were thus peacefully removed from power and a new period in Polish history began.

The events unfolding in Poland triggered changes in other communist countries, with the subsequent fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991). The Roman Catholic Church, perceived in society as a refuge for the then opposition circles, was granted official privileges in its relations with the state, and it gained influence on the new reality that was taking shape in Poland. At the same time, a period of dynamic capitalist development began. In 1999, Poland joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and on 1 May 2004 it was admitted to the European Union (EU).

The political order of the Republic of Poland was set out in the constitution of April 1997, which defined the country as a parliamentary republic based on pluralism, the rule of law, and respect for civil society. The constitution states that Poland is a "democratic state ruled by law and implementing the principles of social justice," with a tripartite division of power. The legislative power is exercised by the Sejm, the highest decision-making body, and the Senate; the executive power by the Council of Ministers and the President;



and the judicial power by the courts and tribunals.

The alignment with Western structures accelerated the modernization of Polish society, causing a flare-up of ideological and political disputes that led to its polarization. Under the banner of extensive reforms, the right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) party came to power in 2015. Its judicial reforms raised controversies and were contested by parts of Polish society and criticized by EU institutions. There were also public protests about reforms in education, which denounced the attempts at subordinating education to one particular worldview. The

refugee crisis on the border with Belarus, which deliberately opened up its territory to refugees from African and Middle Eastern countries wishing to enter the EU, reverberates loudly in Poland and beyond.

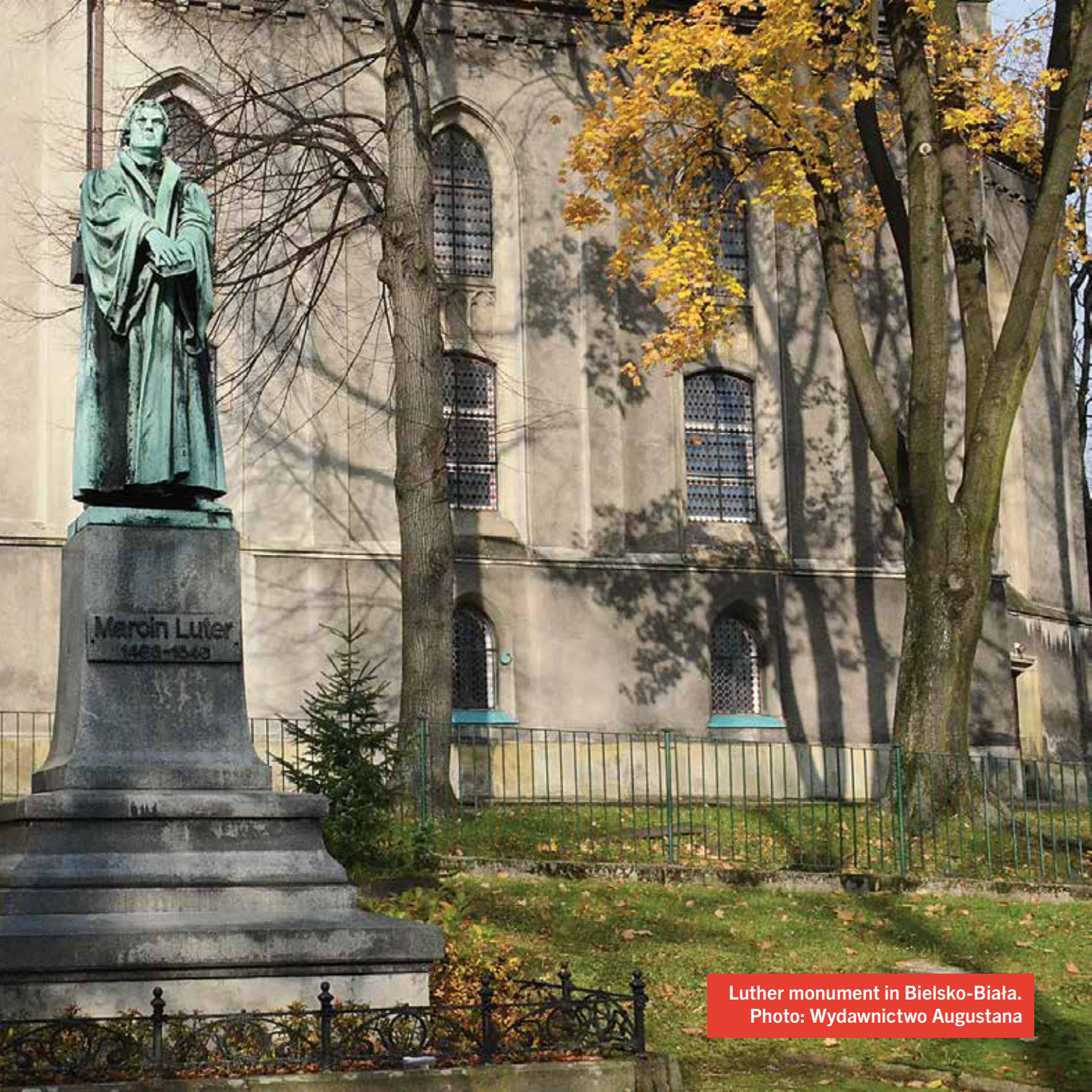
In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic reached Poland, resulting in restrictions and lockdowns as well as financial distress for many individuals and businesses. A year later, a free vaccination program for all citizens was introduced. The following year, 2022, saw rising inflation that affected the financial situation of Poles and led to economic hardship.

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched an armed invasion of Poland's neighbor, Ukraine. Poland provided shelter for millions of refugees and supported their integration into Polish society. Many Polish women and men organized collections and aid campaigns for Ukraine, and publicly demonstrated their support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Poland sent to Ukraine humanitarian aid such as food and medicine convoys, and provided support in military training and equipment. Actively supporting Ukraine, it also joined the efforts of the international community for peace in Ukraine and the strengthening of Ukraine's position in the region and in the world.

High inflation has become a real concern for Polish families. The significant rise in prices in recent months has left many families feeling financially insecure. There is an ongoing crisis in health care, which is due,

among other things, to lack of adequate funding and insufficient numbers of health care professionals. Aware of the challenges, Polish society engages in many positive campaigns and valuable initiatives. One of these is the annual fundraising campaign of the Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy (Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity), a foundation which for 31 years has organized collections for much-needed medical equipment that is then purchased and donated to hospitals. In 2022, it raised a record-breaking amount of PLN 224,376,706 (around EUR 52,181,000). In 2023, the funds that will be raised will go toward diagnostic equipment related to the early detection of sepsis.

Poland will hold its next parliamentary elections in late 2023, and local government elections are scheduled for 2024.



Martin Luther  
1483-1546

Luther monument in Bielsko-Biała.  
Photo: Wydawnictwo Augustana

# HISTORY OF LUTHERANISM IN POLAND

Dome of the Trinity Church.  
Photo: Agnieszka Godfrejów-Tarnogórska

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Poland entered the period of its greatest prosperity known as the “Golden Age.” It was ruled by kings of the Jagiellonian dynasty (Polish: Jagiellonowie), a royal dynasty originating in Lithuania that reigned in some countries of Central Europe between the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but the role of the nobility and the magnates was becoming increasingly important. Poland succeeded in a long war against the Teutonic Order (a Catholic religious institution founded as a military society); its monastic state was transformed into the secular principality of Prussia, which had been dependent on Poland. Its ruler, Prince Albrecht Hohenzollern, embraced Lutheranism, and Prussia became the first all-Lutheran state in Europe in 1525.

The two main currents of the Reformation reached Poland as early as during the reign of King Sigismund the Old (1467–1548). The northern part of the republic was inspired by the writings of Martin Luther and the influence of predominantly Lutheran city of Königsberg, while the southern part – through contacts with Silesia – mainly by influences from Switzerland and the south of Germany. The Reformation in Poland reached its full bloom in the early second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The ideas of Martin Luther first reached Cieszyn Silesia (a

historical region in southeastern Silesia, centered on the towns of Cieszyn and Český Těšín and divided by the Olza River) during the reign of Casimir II (1449–1529). The Reformation was officially embraced by Wenceslaus III Adam of Cieszyn. Following the principle “cuius regio, eius religio” (whose realm, their religion), Lutheranism became the dominant religion in the Duchy of Cieszyn.

In the early 1550s, the first Calvinist synods began to be held in Małopolska (Lesser Poland, whose traditional center is Kraków), while the first Lutheran synod was convened in Poznań in 1555. Philip Melancthon and John Calvin corresponded with their Polish followers, sending them specific instructions. It was at this time that the first Polish- and German-speaking Lutheran congregations appeared in Wielkopolska (Greater Poland); synods were convened regularly, and a superintendent was appointed to oversee the whole church. A key role in the development of the Polish Reformation was played by the most eminent Polish Reformer, Jan Łaski, who sought to unite Polish Protestants and establish a national church.

The proponents of unification succeeded in bringing about a settlement between



The Warsaw Confederation. Photo: Michal Karski

representatives of the various Reformation denominations in Sandomierz in 1570. In the spirit of ecumenism, mutual recognition of the sacraments and the preaching ministry was declared. In addition, at the 1573 Sejm in Warsaw, the nobility passed a resolution known as the Warsaw Confederation, which guaranteed peace between those “in disagreement about the faith.” Even though the Warsaw Confederation was never implemented and failed to prevent later acts of religious intolerance in Poland, it nevertheless represented an unprecedented act of guaranteeing religious freedoms on a European scale.

## TIMES OF COUNTER-REFORMATION AND OPPRESSION

After the death of King Sigismund Augustus in 1572, the situation of Protestants in the republic began to gradually deteriorate. From the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, Polish Protestants were destined to be a religious minority in the increasingly intolerant environment of the Catholic majority. The Protestant nobility were gradually excluded from holding higher state offices. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the situation also worsened for Protestants living in Silesia, then part of the Kingdom of Bohemia, where the Catholic Habsburgs were in power. The end of the Thirty Years’ War in 1648 marked a certain relaxation of the emperor’s religious policy for Lower Silesia, which was reflected in his agreement to build three churches (called Churches of Peace) in Świdnica, Jawor and Głogów. However, at the same time in Cieszyn Silesia, events unfolded that heralded a period of the most severe religious persecution. The Habsburgs, who had ruled the duchy since 1653, deprived the Protestants of all churches. Despite the persecution, local Lutherans began to gather in the Beskid forests for secret church services in the so-called “forest churches.” The situation was somewhat alleviated due to pressure from



Lutheran Sweden in 1707, resulting in the construction of six churches (called Churches of Grace) in Silesia. One of these was built in Cieszyn, becoming the only house of prayer for Upper Silesia Lutherans for decades to come.

## POLAND DISAPPEARS FROM EUROPE'S MAP

Toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the counter-Reformation in Poland took a certain downturn. This was due, among other things, to a shift in the international balance of power, namely, the gradually increasing influence of Protestant Prussia and Orthodox Russia on politics in Poland. Soon these countries, together with Austria, partitioned Poland, which disappeared from the maps of Europe for more than 120 years. From the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, an intensive process of German colonization took place in the Prussian partitioned territories. This entailed an increase in the number of Lutherans in Wielkopolska (Greater Poland). There was a similar development in Silesia, where new Protestant parishes were rapidly emerging due to increasing industrialization. In addition to churches, educational institutions were also founded. In 1890, at the initiative of Eva von Tiele-Winckler, known as Mother Eva, the

Friedenshort (Abode of Peace) care facility was established in Miechowice. It became the largest Protestant center of diakonia in Upper Silesia at the time, and was also active in the missionary field. Similar care facilities were created in 1923, including the Eben-Ezer Care Home in Dziegielów near Cieszyn, in Cieszyn Silesia, which was run by Rev. Karol Kulisz.

## WAR IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

When the First World War ended and Poland regained its independence in 1918, a difficult process began: church structures had to be rebuilt on the territory of the former partitions. Leaders of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession [Lutheran church] initiated efforts to unify the church system in the country. This was accomplished through the 1936 presidential decree, which introduced in the church the synodal-consistory system and the supreme office of the Bishop of the Church (presiding bishop). The Rev. Juliusz Bursche was appointed to this office.

The outbreak of the Second World War marked the beginning of the most difficult period in the entire history of the Lutheran church in Poland. Many pastors, not only of Polish nationality, were arrested,

persecuted, imprisoned in concentration camps, and many lost their lives. The occupiers confiscated the property of Polish parishes.

## POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION

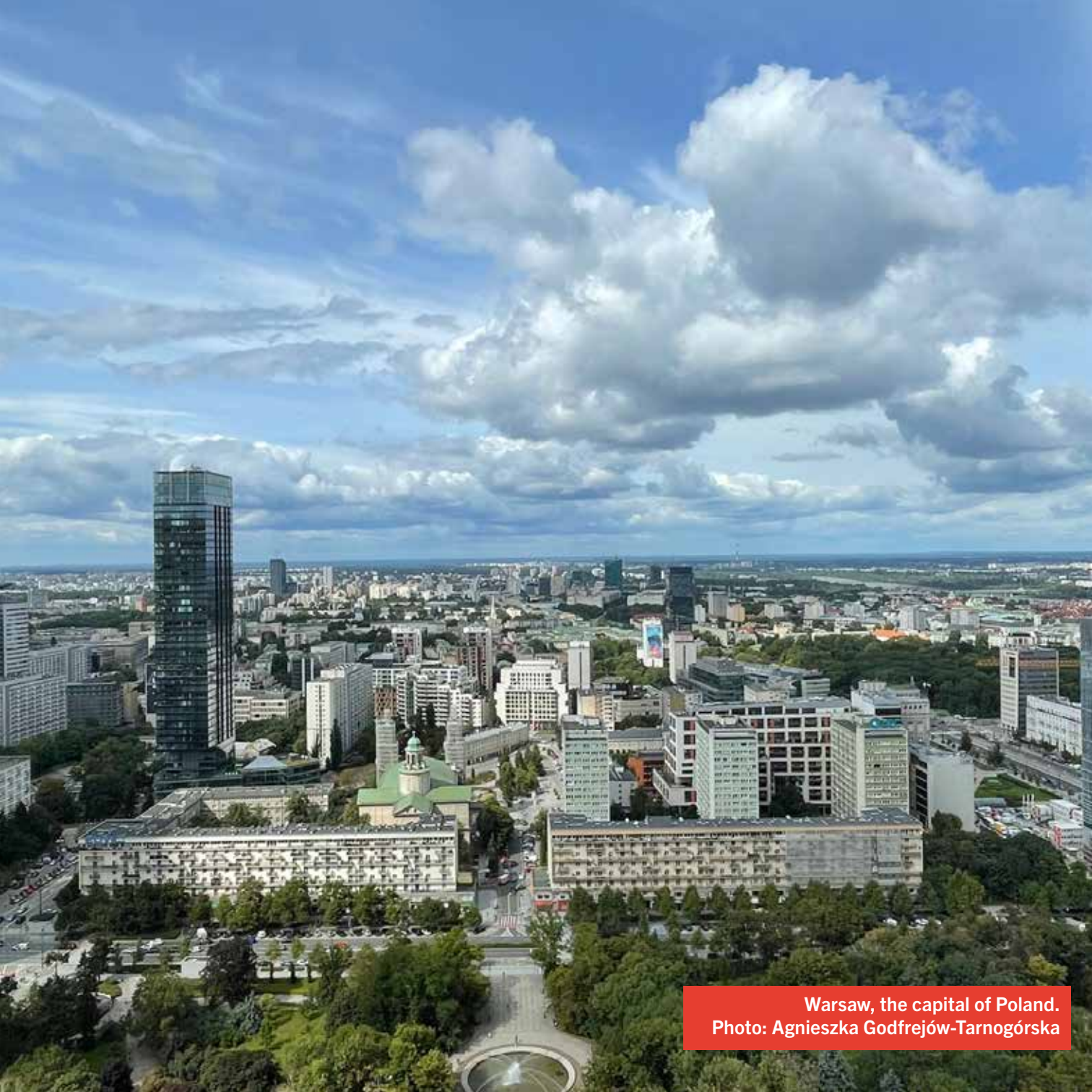
The post-war years marked a slow and arduous period of rebuilding church structures. In the political reality of an Eastern Bloc country, this was an effort met with resistance and harassment from the new authorities. In 1945, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession with its headquarters in Warsaw was declared the successor of the pre-war Lutheran churches. It gathered believers of Polish and German nationalities. The first head of the post-war church was Rev. Dr Jan Szeruda, who undertook the consolidation of the church within the new state borders. Poland now included the regions of Dolny Śląsk (Lower Silesia) and Mazury (Masuria), where many Lutherans lived. However, as a result of the policy of the Stalinist authorities, they were

resettled in Germany in the following years. One of the leading bishops during this difficult time was the Rev. Dr Andrzej Wantuła, who served as Vice-President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) from 1963 to 1970.

## PRESENT DAY

It was not until modern times that religious life was normalized. After the political transformation of 1989, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century reformers' dream of full autonomy and self-determination for Protestants in Poland came true. This happened after the Sejm passed the Act on the Relationship of the State to the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in 1994.

Today, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland (ECACP) is a minority church. It has over 60,000 believers in a country that has more than 37.7 million inhabitants.



Warsaw, the capital of Poland.  
Photo: Agnieszka Godfrejów-Tarnogrska

# OUR TASKS



A “Sleepless Night” gathering in Jastrzębie-Zdrój. Held between Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday, the event brings together young people to reflect on the importance of Easter. Photo: CME Mateusz Sikora

## PREACH

### FINDING NEW WAYS

“The challenges facing the church for the upcoming years are all about one fundamental task – proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. Even though the environment is now different and constantly changing, the task remains the same. The cultural changes that have taken place in the last 40 years compel us to be attentive observers and constantly learn new languages of communication. Despite appearances, this is a very difficult task. It takes focus to notice changes, and humility to abandon some of the forms to which we may be strongly attached. Some of the most important social topics at present are: protection from global diseases, the war and tragedy experienced by the Ukrainian people, rising prices, the anticipated shortage of electricity, climate change, and migration. To all those affected, the expectation is that the church brings the good news. Given that the church, with its centuries-old tradition, is increasingly out of step with the needs of modern people, the question arises as to how to do this. And one answer comes to mind: by listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit to find new ways. In this process we need faith, love and humility, for only when we trust in God can we become servants of God’s love. And this is the church’s main goal for today and for the future.”

*Presiding Bishop Jerzy Samiec, head of ECACP.*



Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

We need faith,  
love and humility,  
for only when we  
trust in God can we  
become servants  
of God’s love.

## LISTEN

### CHANGING AND NOTICING CHANGES

“Children and their parents often ask me: ‘Why are our church services so long and stiff, why so many words and difficult phrases?’ It is a great challenge not to slip into superficiality and not to conform to ‘the world,’ but still be willing to make some changes and acknowledge the surprisingly rapid changes that are taking place right in front of us. Another challenge is how to prepare young people, for example, future pastors and religious education teachers, for work in parishes. The parishioners’ demands and expectations are also constantly increasing. The too-long journey to church has become inconvenient, especially when you can listen to and watch the service online. Of course, there is still the desire to meet other believers, to experience fellowship, but it’s enough to go once or twice a month to satisfy it. Another challenge in this day and age is to be able and willing to talk to people who say there is no God, or to those who don’t believe what they hear in church or in religious education classes.”

*Elżbieta Byrtek, teacher of religious education.*



Photo: ECACP

It is a great challenge not to slip into superficiality and not to conform to ‘the world,’ but still be willing to make some changes and acknowledge the surprisingly rapid changes that are taking place right in front of us.



The challenge, therefore, is to be clear and comprehensible in pointing out the privilege of belonging to a community, but also the obligation it entails.

## BE USING POTENTIAL

“The advancing digitization, widespread use of on-demand services, and partial transfer of learning, work, and entertainment to the online sphere have led many young people to look at the church from a customer perspective. This means that they want to be given an individual and special treatment, while they take a selective approach to what the church has to offer, looking for the most convenient option for themselves. The challenge, therefore, is to be clear and comprehensible in pointing out the privilege of belonging to a community, but also the obligation it entails. The recurring phrase in this context is, ‘I don’t have the time.’ Time is indeed in short supply for everyone. For young people, however, this lack of time is particularly dangerous, because it is precisely by spending time together that their character is formed, the right values are transmitted, and their spirituality is formed. The challenge, then, is to find time to be together and make the most of it. Young people, who have been brought up in prosperity and the widespread availability of goods and services, want to enjoy life first, so the challenge is to use their potential and attitudes rather than forcefully try to persuade them to live, think, and behave like someone else, preferably someone from a past they don’t know.”

*Rev. Tymoteusz Bujok, head of the Center for Mission and Evangelism.*

## WITNESS

### GIVING A SENSE OF PURPOSE

“From the perspective of a young student such as myself, the biggest challenge for our church is what to do so that young people see purpose in the existence of the church and the proclamation of the gospel. In a world focused on technology, science, and humans, it is difficult to find space to think about God. How do we show young people that faith and the church’s service to others and society can do a lot of good? That is why it is and will also be a challenge to find a healthy balance between preserving tradition and reaching out to people whose values in life are different from those of their parents and grandparents, and to notice that new and different doesn’t mean inferior. Many young people are deeply concerned with issues such as global warming, environmental protection, and social inequalities. However, in the face of all this, the most important thing for me is that there are still young people for whom it is in the Lutheran church that they find an accepting community where they feel comfortable and that gives them a sense of purpose.”

*Zofia Niemczyk, student of Evangelical theology.*



Photo: ECACP

How do we show young people that faith and the church’s service to others and society can do a lot of good?





It is necessary to offer alternatives to those asking questions without proselytizing, and above all, to be credible witnesses of the gospel, who practice what we preach.

## RESPOND OFFERING REAL HELP

“The Lutheran church in Poland is a minority church and the only one that responds so decisively to social problems in our country; we have expressed support for the Women Strike (*Strajk Kobiet*), we are involved in humanitarian aid at the border with Belarus, and assistance for refugees from Ukraine. We call a war a war, and aggression and violence aggression and violence. It is not just words and gestures – it is real help. It is also our witness to how we understand the commandment to love our neighbor. For some years now, it is with concern that we have observed the growing difficulties in ecumenical contacts: the radicalism, lack of openness to dialogue, or difficulty in speaking with one voice because of different traditions and understandings of the church. The most recent and new cause of ecumenical tensions has been the introduction of women’s ordination as pastors. They have revealed the sad truth about the lack of understanding for the concept of ecumenism. It takes great wisdom to preserve one’s denominational identity without destroying the relationships that have taken so much time to build. Many people in our society are asking questions. The increasing problem of people distancing themselves from an ecclesiastical institution can also apply to our church or churches in general. This is why it is necessary to communicate problems with a strong voice, to be socially open, to offer alternatives to those asking questions without proselytizing, and above all, to be credible witnesses of the gospel, who practice what we preach.”

*Rev. Halina Radacz, one of the first ordained women pastors in Poland.*

## ACT

### DRAWING STRENGTH AND HAVING HOPE

“I believe that we are part of the universal church, part of the body of Jesus Christ, a fellowship in which the gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered according to the institution of Christ, the church of God’s grace and glory where, we as sinners, can draw strength and hope for the future and bear witness to God’s love. However, we live in a world of many conflicts and complexities with different interpersonal relationships, ambitions, often incomprehensible arrangements and references. This has been particularly felt in recent times, both in our country and around its borders. These circumstances necessarily also spill over into church life, constantly compelling us to take action to make our witness credible and effective. Our structures and decision-making processes are the product of biblical and denominational conditions as well as frameworks created by the outside world. They are not given to us once and for all, but require constant response and evaluation. This can be seen precisely from the perspective of the synod, which creates the framework for the church’s functioning. And, it is not only for now, but also in the future. We will need a great deal of wisdom, discernment, but also courage in responding to the changing shape of this world that affects our faith community to be alive, engaged, and socially responsible.”

*Rev. Dr. Adam Malina, President of the Synod.*



Photo: Anna Olek

Our structures and decision-making processes [...] are not given to us once and for all, but require constant response and evaluation.



Confirmation.  
Photo: Karina Reske

# CHURCH STRUCTURE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Lutheran Center in Warsaw.  
Photo: Agnieszka Godfrejów-Tarnogórska

The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland (ECACP) belongs to the family of Lutheran churches. The term evangelical in its name derives from the Greek word euangelion meaning “gospel” or “good news” of Jesus Christ, and the confession of faith made in 1530 in Augsburg. The church consists of six dioceses and 133 parishes, employs 146 pastors, and it ordains both men and women. The smallest and basic organizational unit of the church is a parish. Lutheran parishes in Poland vary in size, with some comprising several thousand believers, and others a few, such as just around 50.

As members of local church communities, parishioners have the opportunity to attend services and receive the sacraments, but they are also responsible for their community. Children and young people attend religious education classes in schools or at the so-called catechetical stations on parish premises. Children’s services called Sunday schools are conducted in parallel with regular Sunday services. Almost every parish has a choir or a music group, and there are also Bible study hours, youth and student meetings, women’s circles, senior groups, concerts and other cultural events. Parishes are active in diaconal, pastoral, and missionary work. The Parish Council, (the

supreme authority of the parish consisting of its adult members who are confirmed and have paid the church contribution for the past year), together with the parish pastor (in charge of the parish and minister of the word of God) and other pastors serving in the parish, manage the parish and are responsible for ensuring that the teachings of the church are kept pure. The council’s task is to support the pastors, cooperate with them, take care of the religious education and upbringing of children and young people, diaconal work, and the management of parish property.

The supreme authority of ECACP is the Church Synod. It meets at least twice a year, and its term of office is five years. The synod’s tasks include, among others:

- Overseeing the preservation of the purity of doctrine and the development of the religious and moral life in the church;
- Upholding the rights, welfare, and unity of the church;
- Determining the principles of cooperation with other denominations;
- Electing the Presiding Bishop and all the supreme authorities of the church;

- Enacting church laws and approving the reports of the Presiding Bishop and the supreme authorities.

## THE CHURCH SYNOD

The supreme administrative authority of the church and the executive body of the Church Synod is the Consistory, which also serves a five-year term. Its tasks include overseeing dioceses and parishes, admitting candidates to the pastoral ministry, approving the election of parish pastors and diocesan bishops and the national bishop, as well as of chaplains of different communities.

The spiritual supervisor of the church is the Presiding Bishop, who also guards the faithful and pure preaching of the word of God, and the celebration and administration of sacraments in accordance with God's institution. The Presiding Bishop is tasked with supporting the lay and clergy members in carrying out their mission with perseverance, wisdom, and dignity. The national church leader serves the whole church in Poland, and Polish Lutherans abroad. The Church Synod elects the Presiding Bishop for a ten-year term.

All parishes in an area are organized into a diocese, which coordinates and controls parish activities and initiates cooperation between parishes in both religious and diaconal contexts. The decision-making authorities of a diocese are the:

- Diocesan Synod (all active pastors of the diocese and lay representatives of each parish);
- Four-member Diocesan Council (executive authority);
- Diocesan Bishop (spiritual head of the diocese).

The Diocesan Bishop's term of office is ten years and that of the Diocesan Synod is five years.

The church is involved in various ways in pastoral, evangelization, diaconal, and educational work. The Evangelical Military Chaplaincy (in Polish, Ewangelickie Duszpasterstwo Wojskowe – EDW), which was established in 1919 and provides pastoral care to soldiers and civilian employees of the military and their families, has a long tradition in the church. The EDW is headed by the Chief Military Chaplain. Lutheran chaplains also work in



Rev. Małgorzata Gaś baptizes at the Trinity Church. Photo: Aldona Karska

fire departments and police forces, as part of the Evangelical Prison Chaplaincy, the Evangelical Chaplaincy of the Polish Scout Association, as well as in correspondence and internet chaplaincy. Pastoral care is also provided for the hearing-impaired, people living with other disabilities, and those at risk of social exclusion. Each local pastor visits his or her parishioners in hospitals, care centers, and nursing homes, in which they are supported by members of diaconal groups as diaconal networks and volunteers.

Mission and evangelism work is an important aspect of the life of the Polish Lutheran church. For more than 25 years, ECACP's Center for Mission and Evangelism has operated throughout Poland through local communities, reaching out to various age groups and communities. It has been active in social service work (people living on the streets, psychological and pastoral counselling), supporting other people in need (e.g. the "Christmas Present" campaign), and through culture and media. Its activities are largely based on volunteer work.



**Sunday School.**  
**Photo: Karina Reske**

Helping others is part of the practice of Christian life, which is the reason behind the existence of ECACP's Polish Diakonia. Its motto is a passage from Matthew 25:40: "As you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." Its tasks are to identify new areas of social service work and to create and support relief institutions, dioceses and parishes in fulfilling their diaconal and social tasks. Polish Diakonia also runs programs and campaigns for children from socially vulnerable families and activities to improve educational opportunities, as well as youth

exchange initiatives within the framework of the European Voluntary Service. It also creates and implements projects for refugees, conducts fundraising (e.g., for natural disasters), and educates and trains co-workers and volunteers. On a day-to-day basis, it cooperates with representatives of social welfare, state institutions, local authorities, social foundations, and diaconal services at home and abroad.

The Reformation placed great emphasis on the education of boys and girls to enable them to study the Scriptures, which is why



schools were established at parishes from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward. Today, there are private schools and kindergartens within the church, which are usually run by evangelical foundations or societies. The activities of these schools are sometimes linked to the parishes: for example, buildings are leased from them and students who are parish members benefit from scholarships. The schools are open to all denominations, religions and beliefs, and their charters refer to a system of values based on Christian traditions, tolerance, and the evangelical work ethos.

Future pastors study at the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw (ChAT). It was founded in 1954 as a continuation of the University of Warsaw Faculty of Evangelical Theology and School of Orthodox Theology, which were established after the First World War. This independent state academy has an ecumenical profile and has two faculties: theology and social sciences. The theological faculty has three departments (Evangelical, Old Catholic, and Orthodox). It educates teachers of religious education and school counselors, as well as professionals active in social rehabilitation and social work. ChAT is also the academic patron of the Ecumenical University of the Third Age, which is a cultural and educational institution for senior citizens.

After graduating from the academy with a master's degree in evangelical theology, pastoral candidates are required to complete an internship in parishes and attend classes at the Pastoral Institute. These include further training for assistant pastors and pastor-administrators. Further training courses for clergy and church workers are also organized by the Society for Counseling and Pastoral Psychology. It was inspired by the pastoral and counseling and superintendence courses organized by the Association of Pastors and Catechists of ECACP, in cooperation with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Pastoralpsychologie, the Society for Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling, and the Chair of Practical Theology of the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw.

The church maintains a Mediation and Counseling Center (CMP), whose aim is to support amicable resolution of conflicts, for instance between pastors themselves, or laity, as well as between ordained and lay.

ECACP is also present in the media, including social media, and runs the following websites: [luteranie.pl](http://luteranie.pl), [ewangelicy.pl](http://ewangelicy.pl), [bik.luteranie.pl](http://bik.luteranie.pl), and [kosciolwsieci.net](http://kosciolwsieci.net). Thanks to agreements with partners, church services and programs can be broadcast on public television and radio as part of

the so-called Ecumenical Service. The church's country-wide magazine *Zwiastun Ewangelicki* has appeared for 160 years now. It also runs two publishing houses: Augustana and Warty, and the Augustana publishing house.

As a founding member of the national ecumenical organization, the Polish Ecumenical Council, or PRE, ECACP cooperates with six churches from the Old Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions and maintains official relations with the Roman Catholic Church. It is also one of the founding members of the LWF in 1947. It nurtures relationships with churches in the communion, and church representatives actively participate in LWF's work. In addition, it maintains contacts with many Protestant churches around the world. In particular, it cooperates with the: Oregon Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Silesian Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Czech Republic; regional German Protestant churches in

Bavaria, Hessen-Nassau, Rhineland, and North and Westphalia; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary; Protestant Church in the Netherlands; Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic; and the Uppsala Archdiocese of Church of Sweden. The Polish Lutheran church is also active in the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE).

From the very beginning of the refugee crisis resulting from the war in Ukraine, Lutheran parishes have been actively involved in helping those seeking refuge and support. This assistance is possible thanks to the generosity of Polish Lutherans, and financial support from the LWF and Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, the humanitarian aid agency of German Protestant churches. ECACP is also involved in helping refugees staying at the Polish-Belarusian border. All aid activities are implemented thanks to support from parishes, dioceses, pastoral ministries, and church organizations.



Photo: Danuta Matloch



View of church towers of the Basilica of St. Michael the Archangel, in central Kraków. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

# ECUMENICAL LANDSCAPE

Many consider Poland to be a Roman Catholic country and a country of religious people. Meanwhile, in recent years there has been a slow decline in the level of religious belief and a faster decline in the level of practice (according to the Center for Public Opinion Research). Statistics in June 2022 showed that 84 percent of adults described themselves as believers, with 42 percent practicing regularly. The majority of Poles, that is, 92 percent, belong to the Roman Catholic Church. However, Poland is not only this one Christian denomination. In 2022, there were officially 191 registered churches and religious associations (not only Christian). The legal status of 15 of these is regulated by statute; another 171 are listed in the so-called Register of Churches and Other Religious associations kept by the Ministry of the Interior and Administration. The second largest religious group are members of the Orthodox Church (0.9%). Members of Protestant churches make up 0.3%, Jehovah's Witnesses 0.2%, and members of the Greek Catholic Church 0.1% of Poland's population. This

picture may, however, differ slightly from reality, as it is not entirely clear to what extent the research study, conducted before the Russian aggression against Ukraine, included economic migrants from Ukraine, Belarus, or, for example, India and Vietnam. At the beginning of 2023, it was estimated that there could be around 1.7 million refugees from Ukraine in Poland, not counting those who were already there before. Regardless of this, a trend of a slow loss of church importance has been observed in Polish society for a long time.

Despite its apparent homogeneity, Poland has a very interesting ecumenical landscape, which is a carbon copy of everything that is happening in the global ecumenical movement. Besides the PRE, we have the ecumenical Bible Society in Poland, the Evangelical Alliance, the Polish Christian Forum, ecumenical movements in the Roman Catholic Church, and official dialogue structures with other churches. There is the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the World Day of Prayer, and one of the most recent events, the Season of Creation. It may



Photo: Polish Ecumenical Council

seem strange that it is only recently that the climate justice topic has emerged in the Polish ecumenical movement, but it has nevertheless become significant in recent years.

The Polish Ecumenical Council or PRE was founded in 1946 by 12 Evangelical, Old Catholic, and Orthodox churches. Currently it is a fellowship of seven churches and two affiliated organizations. It includes the: Baptist Church (5,500), ECACP (60,500), Evangelical Methodist Church (4,000), Evangelical Reformed Church (3,200), Polish-Catholic Church (25,000), Old Catholic Mariavite Church (22,000), and

the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (600,000). The council's churches represent approximately two percent of the Polish population. The two organizations affiliated to the council—the Social Society of Polish Catholics and Bible Society in Poland—have been active since 1816 and they comprise 11 churches. In 2018, the Bible Society published an ecumenical translation of the Bible into Polish, and although it was not the first translation into Polish, it was the first to be prepared and accepted by all the churches belonging to the society.

The PRE is part of the international ecumenical movement, has associate council status with the World Council of Churches, is a founding member of the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe, and a member of the International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action (interdiac). It supports and cooperates with the National Committee of the World Day of Prayer, the Conference of European Churches, the European Christian Environmental Network, and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe. Since 1974 there has been a Commission for Contact between PRE and the Evangelical Church of Germany. Among the German churches, the Evangelical Church of Hesse and Nassau and the Evangelical Church of Westphalia are

also partners. PRE also cooperates with the Frankfurt-based Evangelical initiative Zeichen der Hoffnung – Znaki Nadziei, which helps former concentration camp prisoners from the Second World War.

The Christian Theological Academy is a unique entity founded in 1954 as a continuation of University of Warsaw's Faculty of Evangelical Theology and School of Orthodox Theology, which were established after the First World War. Today it has two faculties; theology and social sciences, of which three theological sections train religious education clergy and teachers from various Christian churches.

Dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church is essential for Polish ecumenism. It is conducted on an official level mainly by the PRE. The Joint Commission of the Polish Bishops' Conference (KEP) for Ecumenism and the PRE was established in 1974. Within the KEP itself, teams for dialogue with the Orthodox, Lutheran, Polish-Catholic, Old Catholic Mariavite, and Adventist churches were established, followed by the creation of bilateral commissions with these communities (the Catholic-Mariavite commission concluded its work in 2011). The cooperation has resulted in jointly developed documents, appeals, and

statements. This includes the Declaration on Mutual Recognition of the Validity of Baptism; appeals on the protection of creation, respect and celebration of Sunday, and a message on refugees. A document on mixed marriages is still awaiting the Holy See's approval.

Ecumenism is first and foremost a social grassroots movement, which over time develops its own structures. In Poland there are also ecumenical organizations known in other countries, such as Chemin Neuf, Focolare, or Taizé. Polish associations have also been established, including the EFFATHA Peace and Reconciliation Association, the Christian Ecumenical Association in Ustroń, and the Ecumenical University of the Third Age in Warsaw. Perhaps one of the most spectacular events is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which is celebrated annually, and attended not only by the Roman Catholic Church and PRE churches and those associated with the Bible Society, but also by representatives and believers of churches that do not necessarily dialogue with each other on a daily basis. And although also in Poland, as in other countries, it seems that ecumenical enthusiasm has weakened in recent years, it is the pulse of ecumenism to pray together.



Child psychologist Svitlana Kabanova is one of many Ukrainians refugees taking Polish classes at ECACP's Radom Parish, with LWF's support. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert



# BELONGING TO THE LWF

To say that ECACP is a minority church does not say very much about it. The church has had a difficult history of fighting for its beliefs, for the opportunity to bear witness to its faith, and to serve others. We have weathered all the historical storms by God's grace and friends in the international community who have always remembered the small handful of Lutherans in a country dominated by Catholicism. In the most difficult moments of their history, Polish Lutherans not only felt the prayer support coming from the LWF, but also concrete material assistance, enabling them to function on a daily basis. The bond between the global communion and the Lutheran church in Poland, which has lasted from the very beginning, is a gift from God to us.

Our church has made international relations part of its identity. The development of this process is reflected in three areas. Firstly, in ECACP's history, which dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Secondly, in the numerous landmark international meetings including: the 1923 founding of the Lutheran World Convention in Eisenach, Germany, and LWF's founding in Lund, Sweden in 1947; 1961 LWF Executive Committee meeting in Warsaw, Poland; 1987 LWF Executive Committee in Viborg, Denmark at a critical moment for Poland in the 1980s; or in 1990 at the Eighth LWF Assembly in Curitiba, Brazil, up to the Thirteenth Assembly in Kraków in 2023. And thirdly, in the experiences and testimonies of many people.

## A CHANGED VIEW OF THE CHURCH

“Participating in the LWF Assembly in Canada changed my view of the church; you could say that I experienced its universality and diversity. I realized that Jesus Christ unites people who are truly different. We often lock ourselves up in our communities, forgetting that it is not just us who pray [...]. Polish Lutheranism is diverse because from region to region it embraces unique histories, customs and traditions. [...] We are therefore accustomed to diversity. Perhaps this is why we enjoy international church relations so much. Our parishes look for foreign partners, we are happy to visit partner parishes and receive visitors at home.”

*Dorota Czauderna-Pracka, theologian and English teacher, participated in the Tenth LWF Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada in 2003.*



Photo: ECACP

Polish Lutheranism is diverse because from region to region it embraces unique histories, customs and traditions.



## EXPERIENCING THE CHURCH'S UNIVERSALITY

“The LWF allowed me to experience the universality of the church. Something has started and continues: I am a Christian of the Lutheran tradition, and our Lutheran family – local, European and global – belongs to the universal church. Yes, this realization remains for me the most precious, deepest, and most vivid experience when I think of the LWF. To this day, whenever in the liturgy I recite the Creed, the memories of meetings in Buenos Aires, Curitiba, Hong Kong, and many other places come back to me. There is only one difference that I have observed over time: there are more and more of these memories during the Creed now. [...] The LWF has shaped my theological thinking to a considerable extent. It has shown me the different perspectives of the Lutheran church in the world and opened the world of the universal church to me. This universal church is also here, where I work now, and yet it does not end here. [...] I do not ask what my church can give to others, including the LWF. In my opinion, it is more important for my church to be present in the LWF, to be present in the ecumenical family. She should remain herself and be open to experiencing the universal church. And when others get to know us, they should decide for themselves what they can and want to take from the experience of community with the Lutheran church in Poland.”

The LWF has shaped my theological thinking to a considerable extent.

*Rev. Piotr Gaś, pastor in charge of the Holy Trinity Parish in Warsaw, long-term member of ECACP's Consistory and Synod, and former member of the LWF Council.*

## DEEPENED SPIRITUALITY

“I have been involved in the work of the LWF desk for Women in Church and Society (WICAS) and present in the network of media communicators among LWF member churches for more than 15 years. Undoubtedly, I would be a different person today if it had not been for my involvement in the LWF, which deepened my spirituality, broadened my knowledge, and enabled me to apply it practically on Polish soil. But the added value is the people, their beauty, wisdom, and diversity. People among whom I have never felt inferior because of my origin, gender, or skin color, who can bring out and appreciate my commitment and skills. It is the people, as part of a community like the LWF, who make me feel that in my spiritually, I am never alone.”

*Agnieszka Godfrejów-Tarnogórska, theologian and ECACP's media spokesperson, coordinator of LWF WICAS for Central Eastern Europe (2011-2019 and 2023).*



Photo: Joanna Kolef-Pracka

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## VISIBLE WITNESS

“The first and most important experience is living in diversity. As a church living alongside a very large, dominant ecumenical partner in Poland, we are not always able to cope with and appreciate our own diversity. Secondly, the theological response to present-day challenges. Theological interpretations of such issues as care for creation, ecumenical engagement, diakonia, or public engagement developed within the LWF are an important source of support for the theological thinking of Polish Lutheranism. [...] Despite being small in our country, through diaconal activities, public engagement, and our publications, we try to be visible witnesses of the gospel of Jesus Christ read through the eyes of Lutheran experience.”

*Prof. Jerzy Sojka, member of the LWF Council, expert on Luther's theology, and lecturer at the Christian Academy of Theology in Warsaw, Poland.*

Through diaconal activities, public engagement, and our publications, we try to be visible witnesses of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## LEARNING TO APPRECIATE

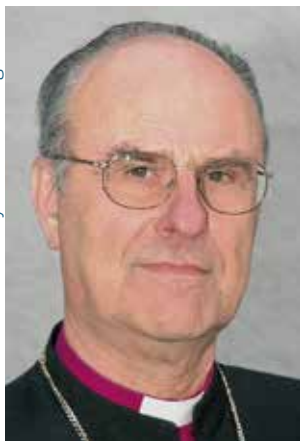
“I spent seven years serving as a member of the LWF Council as a representative of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland. During that time, I participated in the work of the Committee for World Service; I was also invited to cooperate in projects concerning climate change and the role of women in church and society. [...] I have experienced Lutheran diversity. I have learned about different ways of approaching certain topics, and I have had the privilege of personally visiting some of the member churches. I accompanied both theological discussions and had the opportunity to get to know closely the humanitarian and development work of the LWF. Many meetings and conversations have significantly influenced my perception of various aspects of present-day reality. I have seen what characterizes Lutheran communities in the world, what problems they face, and the biggest challenges for them. This knowledge is necessary to reflect on what it means to be Lutheran in general. And looking at communities far away from us, we learn to appreciate many things—the joy and simplicity of life, openness, the desire to go beyond clichés, the ability to enjoy the little things to which others wouldn’t pay attention at all.”

*Iwona Baraniec, Bible scholar and staff of Polish Diakonia, former member of the LWF Council from 2010 to 2017.*



Photo: Iwona Baraniec's personal collection

Many meetings and conversations have significantly influenced my perception of various aspects of present-day reality.



## CONTACTS AND ASSISTANCE

“Membership in the global communion of Lutheran churches made it possible to stay in touch with member churches from abroad. Thanks to these contacts we did not feel isolated. In the sixties we were invited to take part in various conferences organized by the LWF, which was a doorway to the free world. We received scholarships for students too. Offerings made by individual churches or Protestant organizations from Europe and the United States of America were brought together in Geneva. The LWF then worked out annual budgets to assist churches behind the Iron Curtain. Aid from German or Nordic churches was not welcome in the Polish People’s Republic at the time. That is why it was first transferred to Geneva and only after that sent to Poland. This solution made it possible to rebuild many churches or parishes. So Polish Lutherans benefit from symbols of that support until this day.”

*Bishop Jan Szarek (1936-2020 †), an ecumenist and international activist, head of ECACP and PRE president from 1993 to 2001.*

Membership in the global communion of Lutheran churches made it possible to stay in touch with member churches from abroad.



Photo: Agnieszka Godfrejów-Tarnogórska











Kościół Ewangelicko-Augsburski  
w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej



THE  
LUTHERAN  
WORLD  
FEDERATION

A Communion  
of Churches