THE
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FEDERATION

NOW THERE ARE VARIETIES

A STUDY DOCUMENT ON LUTHERAN IDENTITY IN THE GLOBAL LUTHERAN COMMUNION

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Cover photo:
A wooden cross at the LWF Twelfth Assembly commemoration of the 500th Reformation anniversary in Windhoek, Namibia, in 2017.

Photo: LWF/Johanan Celine Valeriano

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Preface

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is a communion of churches which share a common tradition that equips us for vibrant witness in diverse contexts. The dynamism between maintaining unity and celebrating diversity is never easy.

In a global context where movements toward economic and political uniformity are on the rise and ethno-nationalist populist movements threaten to erode human rights and liberty around the world, the LWF's witness as a just, inclusive, and beautifully diverse communion is a gift.

The Twelfth LWF Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia in 2017 committed the communion to the task of exploring "our shared understanding of the theological identity of LWF member churches through which [we] will continue recognizing each other belonging to the communion, while witnessing in [our] diverse contexts." Since 2019, the LWF Department for Theology, Mission and Justice has led a four-year study process on Lutheran identity that brought together lay leaders, teaching theologians, and practitioners in local communities for a variety of consultations, webinars, small-scale projects and a global survey that attracted over 2,800 participants from around the communion.

The process produced several resources, including a report from the 2019 consultation in Addis Ababa, the publication *We Believe in the Holy Spirit: Global Perspectives on Lutheran Identities (LWF Documentation 63)*, and a series of online videos that explore themes related to Lutheran Identity that can be downloaded and used in parishes and classrooms. Finally, the results of the survey, projects, and consultations have been synthesized in this Study Document.

Photo: LWF/S. Gallay

Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt
General Secretary
The Lutheran World Federation

The first section points to the dynamic dialogue between faith formation and cultural identity. The second section traces the contours of the shared theological tradition that grounds Lutherans in a common confession of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The third section explores diverse vocations in which Lutherans are called to embody the gospel, and the cultures and traditions through which Lutherans express our Christian faith. The final section presents the communion as a gift to faithfully discern the diverse gifts of the Spirit for the building up of the body.

The golden thread that runs throughout this study is the gift and promise that liberates the baptized to live into the fullness of our identities, and yet binds us to one another and all creatures in the love of the Holy Trinity.

On the occasion of the Thirteenth LWF Assembly, I commend this *Study Document* as an invitation to explore the way in which the **One Spirit** calls you to communion in the **One Body** of Christ, and equips you to express our **One Hope** in your context.

Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt
General Secretary
The Lutheran World Federation

Executive Summary

The Lutheran World Federation's call to live and work together as a communion of churches is rooted in a shared commitment to ongoing reformation. Lutherans are part of a living Christian tradition that is always reforming.

Since it was founded in 1947, the LWF has had a rich history of theological study processes that seek to understand this living tradition. The current study process aims to explore our shared Lutheran identity and the ways that diverse identities are expressed across our polycentric communion.

The concept of "identity" is contested. Against the backdrop of anthropocentrism and ecological disintegration, economic, social, and political exclusion, gender-based discrimination and resurging "ethno-nationalism"[1], the concept of "identity" can be a binary, prescriptive tool of exclusion. But if the basis of our Lutheran identity is Christian liberty, then our confessional identity can be a foundation for liberation and bridge building. The liberation to find one's true human identity in loving relationship to God and every other creature is the Trinitarian core of the Lutheran confession. Our baptismal identity gives birth to a diversity of holy, life-giving expressions of our Christian vocation. As Paul's letter to the Galatians states, "For freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal 5:1).

Being Lutheran does not prescribe one identity. 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. Lutherans share normative commitments: the Bible, sacraments, a catechism, the means of grace, common contours for ministry and service and the Augsburg Confession among other confessional writings. But like Luther's translation of the Bible, these norms are embodied through a diversity of languages, cultures, forms of worship, spirituality, service, and expressions of public witness in minority and majority contexts. For that reason, expressions of the Lutheran tradition have always been negotiated.

Conflicts and concord are within the confessional writings, and for good reason. Diversity is God's wisdom woven into the fabric of creation. Christ prayed for our unity (Jn 17:11). But maintaining unity in diversity is never easy.

The LWF strives to strengthen narratives about "our shared understanding of the theological identity of LWF member churches through which [we] will continue recognizing each other, belonging to the communion, while witnessing in [our] diverse contexts."

(With Passion for the Church and for the World: LWF Strategy 2019-2024)

The LWF began a theological study process with the affirmation that our identity is based on the one who identifies us as beloved of God. According to our confession of the ecumenical creeds, the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and nurtures a diversity of gifts by which we participate in God's reconciling mission. From 2019 to 2022, the LWF engaged member churches in a study of contemporary Lutheran identities as they are lived in local church contexts. The first phase of this process was a global consultation in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in October 2019. Participants helped create a global survey in English, French, German, Spanish, and Swahili. The survey received over 2,800 responses.

A group of theologians and practitioners reconvened to draft text for this study document that synthesizes findings from the global survey along with the themes that emerged from the consultation, a yearlong series of online webinars that delved deeper into the main findings of the Addis consultation, and the writings included in Documentation #63, *We Believe in the Holy Spirit: Global Perspectives on Lutheran Identities*.

This study document is intended to be a pedagogical resource that member churches can use to discern how the shared theological and spiritual gifts of our Lutheran tradition are instruments for God's Spirit to form our identities through the diverse cultures, ecumenical commitments, interfaith dialogue, and interdisciplinary dialectic that we experience across our global communion today.

Introduction

Describing our Lutheran identity is a process of discovery about God, ourselves, and our relationships. In the course of this study process on Lutheran identity, one participant from Indonesia described his identity in this way: "I have a Batak heart that pumps Lutheran blood."[2]

When we ask questions about Lutheran identity, we are asking questions about how we belong to God, how we belong to one another, and what difference that understanding makes for the way we belong to the rest of creation. The Bible, confessional documents, theological commitments, and practices help Lutherans ask good questions. But they also reveal who God is for us.

"Culture" describes the collection of values, beliefs, and practices that help us make meaning and express ourselves through relationships in our place and time. Martin Luther understood the power and purpose of translating faith into culturally meaningful forms. When Luther translated the Bible into his local German language, he wanted people to understand how Jesus reveals to us the nature of God. But he also expected people to learn something about how we belong to God.[3] The gift of belonging invites us into new relationships to the world around us. A faithful self-understanding makes all the difference for how we relate to the rest of creation.

Luther did not stop at translating the Bible into the local language. He wrote, "Why should not we Germans say mass in our own language, when the Latins, Greeks and many others observe mass in their language? Why should not everyone also be permitted to hear and speak those words of the mass aloud and in German?"[4] Luther translated the liturgy, composed music, wrote a catechism, and more so that people in his context would have a culturally significant way to form baptismal identities, and equip them to reform relationships of justice across all sectors of life.

This faithful work of contextualization continues across our diverse communion of Lutheran churches. Language is only one aspect of culture that shapes the way we understand who we are and to whom we belong. Faith formation is a dynamic process between the Spirit of the Triune God, and the diverse lands and cultures through which the gospel is proclaimed. The Lutheran Identity study process invited participants to reflect on this spirituality of faith formation. The process was designed to be self-reflexive and descriptive about the diverse ways in which God's Spirit calls, gathers, and equips the baptized for ministry.

This study document does not prescribe what it means to be Lutheran. Rather, the study document reflects the descriptive methods of the study process and global survey. This descriptive, reflexive approach asks questions of how Lutherans understand their relationship to the foundational texts and commitments of our shared tradition, and how they express the tradition in our daily contexts. Following this approach, the text is accompanied by data from the global survey on Lutheran identity. As you read, text boxes, data from the global survey and reflection questions guide you through the document.

The experiences expressed by Lutherans around the world invite you to reflect on the many ways in which our shared Lutheran tradition enters into dialogue with cultural traditions and daily life to form our faith identity.

Like our Batak friend, you are invited to consider the cultural heart that pumps the Lutheran tradition in your life and wonder at the diversity of identities across the LWF communion that express the gospel of Jesus.

The LWF commends this study guide as a tool to inspire our communion to embrace its cultural, spiritual, and contextual diversity, and deepen its understanding of the work of God's Spirit that reconciles our diversity in a communion of one body, one Spirit, and one hope.

01: "Varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit"

Lutheran identity is always formed within embodied, culturally embedded contexts. When we consider the relationship between a shared Lutheran tradition and the world of cultural traditions, it is equally correct to speak of Lutheran identity and identities.

Lutherans represent one tradition of belief and practice within the Christian Tradition. As Christians, all Lutherans confess a Triune God. *The Holy Trinity is revealed to us as a relationship of love that:*

- created the entire cosmos, all that is seen and unseen;
- reconciles all creation, and reveals that good news as a gift and promise by grace through faith in Jesus;
- calls us to participate in the ministry of reconciliation through the church, liberating and equipping us by the gift of the Spirit to love our human and non-human neighbors.

The Trinitarian confession is the core of a shared Lutheran identity. But because God's Word of promise meets us in the concrete contexts of created bodies and culturally embedded locations, we are able to speak of Lutheran identities.

Questions of unity and diversity are not new. Reconciled diversity is a theme that runs throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone."

In baptism, each body receives the same gift of the one Spirit (Eph 4:4). But because each body is different, we express the fruit of that Spirit in different ways. Our one baptism unites our diverse bodies into one Body of Christ. Our unity in Christ means "from now on we regard no one from a human point of view." (2 Cor 5:16). This does not mean bodies lose their individual dignity or that we disregard differences.

On the contrary, unity in the body of Christ is a reconciled diversity, which is not the same as uniformity. Uniformity seeks to deny the beauty and health of diversity. Unity describes relationships between diverse beings. This gift of baptismal unity is also a task. It is not easy to respect, include, and safeguard diverse expressions within one body. The act of reconciling diversity is part of the ministry (diakonia) that is entrusted to the church (2 Cor 5:18).

Tradition and Identity

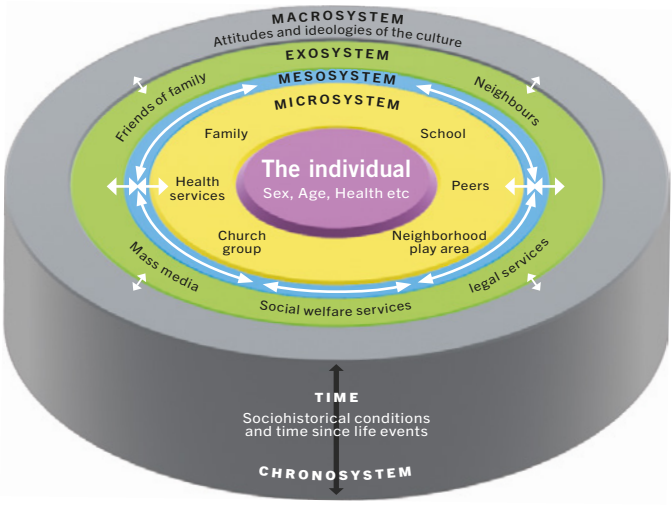
What do we mean by the words "identity" and "identities"?

A baptismal frame helps us understand how expressions of Lutheran identities are both alike and different. Identities are the result of a complex ecology of social, psychological, familial, cultural, political, economic, racial, gender, religious, biological, historical, and technological realities that interact in different ways across the time and experiences of life.[5]

These parts of our life are not discrete. Every culture has a different approach to conceptualize the ways in which social, biological, spiritual, and historical factors intersect to form our individual and collective identity. Our self-understanding about who we are, where we are, and to whom we belong is affected by the relationship between these aspects of our lives. Healthy integration of these diverse aspects of life is one key to living well. Holistically speaking, each aspect of our identity is always underneath or within other parts of our identity.

This means that, in reality, we cannot speak about a faith-based identity apart from all other cultural, historical, social, economic, political, and biological realities of life. Everything belongs together. As one participant stated in the survey, "It is hard to say (what difference it makes in my life to be Lutheran) because I AM Lutheran, I do not know what life would be like without faith."

"The ecological system of personal development" (Uri Brofenbrenner)



This study focuses on the way our faith-based tradition, and various cultural traditions, intersect with the work of the Holy Spirit to form Lutheran identities, and what this dynamic means for approaches to faith formation and ministry across the global communion.

The open question about "What difference does it make in your life to be Lutheran?" gave insight into the variety of approaches to understanding Lutheran Identity across our communion.

There were three kinds of responses.

1. People name grace, liberation, and freedom, often without explanation about why these concepts are significant for them.
2. Many people pointed to cultural or family tradition. Many replied in a manner similar to the respondent who said, "I was raised Lutheran, and it is how I tell people what I am."
3. Many people clearly relate spirituality to their capacity to express faith in life. One person responded, "It is a particular lens through which I see God, the world, and myself". Another affirmed that "Seeing myself as saint and sinner at the same time allows me to be open to accepting change and also contributing to change."

The Lutheran quality of our identities includes a shared tradition and diverse lived experiences. Often the Lutheran tradition is spoken of in terms of the *solae*: Word alone *(sola scriptura),* grace alone *(sola gratia),* Christ alone *(solus Christus),* and faith alone *(sola fide).* However, the very fact of four solae means "one" does not actually exist "alone". One interprets another. While *scripture* is the norm for our teaching and practices, our reading of the Bible must be interpreted in the light of Christ who is actively present in faith by grace.[6] And, our shared Lutheran tradition is never lived in a vacuum. We will explore these aspects later in the study document.[7]

Being Lutheran means living the Lutheran tradition in the midst of many other traditions

Lutherans live in pluralistic societies. Multiple religious belongings affect the way our identities are formed. Sometimes the effect of other religious beliefs and practices comes from social proximity to people of other faiths, as is the case for West African Lutherans who live in predominantly Muslim cultures. Sometimes multiple religious belonging is the result of family members belonging to different religious traditions. Sometimes, multiple religious belonging is part of the values, beliefs, and norms of our cultural identity, as is the case for many Indigenous peoples. For Batak, Sámi, Adivasi/Tribal, Native American, Aboriginal and other First Nations Lutherans, pre-Christian religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions are integral parts of identity and worldviews.

Creative intercultural dialogue helps Christians come to terms with the balance of particularity and universality in the Christian tradition. Critical dialogue helps us repent from, and heal, the wounds of our colonial past. Constructive dialogue with people of other churches, faiths, and wisdom traditions increases religious literacy, strengthens social cohesion, and deepens individual self-understanding. Through ever-increasing circles of dialogue, the Lutheran tradition is a living tradition. Jaroslav Pelikan said,"Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."[8]

Expressions of the Lutheran tradition are always being negotiated and renewed.

Our confessional documents record the conflicts and concord within our history. The Augsburg Confession, Apology, and the Formula of Concord are products of ecumenical debate.

The Spirit of the living, creative God calls us to interpret the word and the world in light of Christ. Lutherans believe Christ is the gift of faith that liberates us to reform and be transformed. One Spanish language respondent commented in the survey, "Being a Lutheran means having the courage to reform traditions and teachings day by day, being able to read the signs of the times and freed to act radically in defense of human rights." Lutheran identity is liberating.

The Addis Ababa consultation noted *that liberation is an organizing principle of the Lutheran tradition.* While justification by grace through faith is the cornerstone of the Lutheran confession, liberation implies that no theological or religious practice should ever bind what has been loosed. Liberation by God's grace implies that nothing given as a gift and promise should be used to burden the heart or conscience. In the letter to the Galatians Paul writes, "for freedom Christ has set us free."

One respondent reflected on the pastoral and psychological significance of this emphasis on liberation from the survey: "Saved by grace through faith is a bedrock for me, and it gives me hope, peace and freedom. To be freed from and freed for is a great gift."

Being Lutheran means to take part in God's liberty

The Addis Ababa consultation urged us to reflect more on the concept of God's liberty to work in the world beyond the bounds of what has been revealed to us in Christ Jesus. On the surface, the notion of God's liberty or freedom beyond the bounds of our confession may not seem to impact our Lutheran identity. But the Lutheran theological tradition began with basic questions of God's liberty to act through the means of grace entrusted to the church.

That liberty was expressed through the notion of a priestly vocation of all the baptized. In baptism, the Holy Spirit calls and equips every Christian to participate in the church's mission in diverse and public ways. Many contemporary questions about the public role of theology, ethics, and the church's witness in public space on issues of climate justice and human rights are grounded in the concept of the freedom of God to work in, with, and under all creation, which is the basis for the inherent dignity of all creatures. Understanding the scope of God's mission (Missio Dei) helps us understand more about the ministry of reconciliation begun in Christ Jesus that was entrusted to the church. *Within God's mission, the church has a mission.*

Reflecting on the scope of the Holy Spirit's work in all creation can help Lutherans understand our baptismal call to participate in that ministry in public, pluralist contexts. One survey respondent serving as mission developer in central Paris expressed it this way:

"This mission is demanding, fulfilling, hard work, and slow at the same time. Trying to find the right balance between tradition and modernity, Lutheran and Parisian lifestyle is not easy. We strongly believe that it is nearly impossible to do Christian mission without the active help of the Holy Spirit."

Due to its intercultural and interdisciplinary significance, the Spirit's work in the world is a fruitful area for theological reflection for the next 500 years of our living Lutheran tradition. Questions about the work of the Holy Spirit frame contemporary dialogues with Orthodox and Pentecostal Christians. Ecumenical dialogues invite us to learn from other Christian traditions, but they also call us to return to our Lutheran tradition and ask new questions. This study document invites us to retrace our steps through our own Lutheran tradition, and the spirituality of our theological commitments, sacramental and liturgical practices, and variety of lived experiences.

Spirituality

To the Christians in Corinth, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed." (1 Cor 12:1)

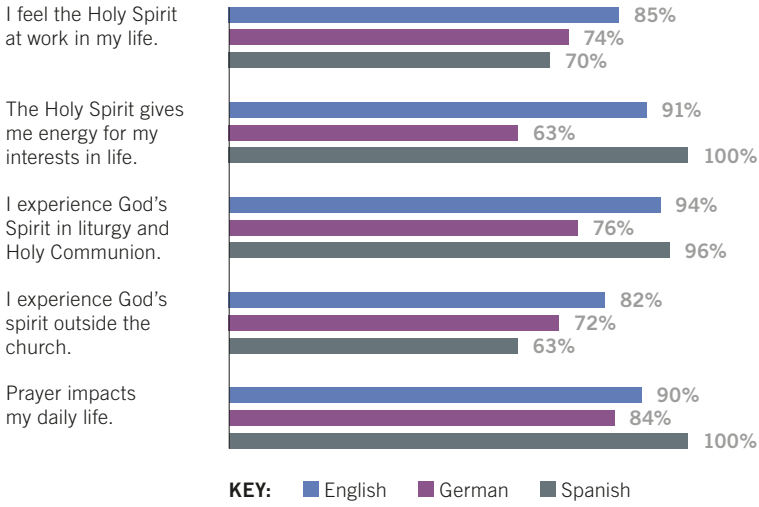
LWF member churches continue to raise questions related to the work of the Holy Spirit. Some churches call for renewal by reviving spirituality, and some struggle to understand the variety of expressions of spiritual gifts that seem to question their experience of faith in the Lutheran tradition.

The Twelfth LWF Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia called for a framework to address these questions as Lutherans.In response to this call, the study process began by asking how the church and our life together relates to the work of the Holy Spirit.[9] Seventy-three percent of the global survey respondents report seeing positive signs of spiritual renewal in their churches. But in the language of the catechism, what does this mean?

Lutheran identity and spirituality are closely linked. There are many ways to speak about spirituality. Cultural and philosophical concepts of soul, spirit, or energy that animate creatures offer ways to affirm the dignity of each body and the integrity of the Earth and all relations. By God's Spirit, all creation lives, moves, and has our being (Acts 17:28). Through the ecumenical creeds, Lutherans confess our belief in the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, a Lutheran "spirituality" refers us to the Spirit of the Triune God who made all that is seen and unseen. Any concept of Lutheran identity begins with the One who identifies us. The Small Catechism teaches that the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, and enlightens us with a diversity of gifts to participate in God's mission to reconcile creation. The Spirit is the ground of our unity and source of our diversity. *The Spirit is the wisdom that creates the beauty of diverse beings, and the bond of peace that reconciles all beings (Eph 4:4-6). By this Holy Spirit, the Trinity continues to create, reconcile, and sanctify the cosmos.*

Perception of the Holy Spirit



Respondents widely affirmed they can feel God's Spirit outside the church. Over 70 percent of all participants affirmed that they feel the Holy Spirit gives them energy in life and more than 90 percent agreed that prayer has an influence on their daily life. On the other hand, there are considerable differences between the regions when it comes to questions about spiritual gifts (see chart on page 17 and 20). This divergence may reflect the historically philosophical and cultural differences in the way we understand the terms "spirit" and "spirituality".

The term "spirituality" is an attempt to describe an experience of the Spirit of God.

Out of the Lutherans who participated in this study, 88 percent claim to experience the Holy Spirit through liturgy. However, it is difficult to describe God's presence with words. An awareness of the limits of language led to the ancient mystical and theological tradition of negative theology *(apophatic) theology*. According to this tradition, it is not possible to use words to positively describe the experience of God.

Metaphors and analogies are as close as language can come to describe an encounter with the Divine mystery. Therefore, some theologians believed that theology can only describe what should not be said about God. Historically, this hesitation to prescribe language about the experience of God may be one reason that some Lutheran theologians found it difficult to write about what we would call spirituality.

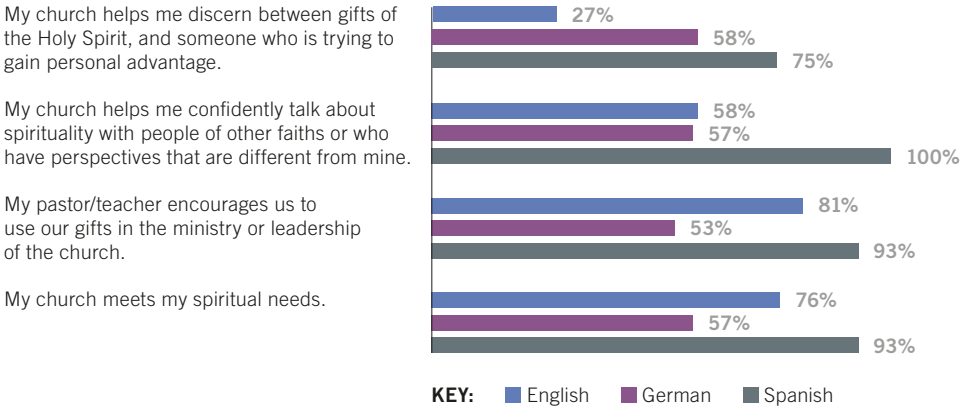
How can we approach the term "spirituality" from a Lutheran perspective?

While the Reformation ushered new ways of theological, philosophical, and scientific thinking in the European context, Martin Luther and many early Lutheran theologians were trained in the ancient theological tradition. Many would have been reluctant to use words to describe experiences of God. These Lutherans certainly experienced God's presence in the daily practice of faith and the course of life. Yet, many of their confessional writings speak about spirituality in critical terms. In order to understand this contradiction, it is important to understand the aim of that critical language.

One aim of confessional writings is to make positive statements about our shared beliefs. The reformers always affirmed God's liberty and the work of the Spirit. However confessional writings also aimed to guard against spiritual abuse arising from misleading theological claims. For this reason, Lutheran confessional writings often critiqued claims that they felt were not faithful expressions of the Spirit's work. Unfortunately, this historic hesitation to write theologically about the experience of God's presence has been interpreted as a separation, or suspicion, between theological doctrine and experience.

The separation between theology and spirituality seems to have remained as an impression of Lutheranism in the European context after the Enlightenment. Although, the study process revealed that across most regions of the Lutheran World Federation, Lutherans broadly identify spirituality and spiritual gifts as markers of Lutheran identity. We still can see that participants indicated that their churches still do not have adequate language to help them speak about spiritual gifts.

Spirituality and church



The critical dialogue between spirituality and theology remains important as a way to discern personal experiences of God in the context of broader relationships within the church and world. Communal spirituality guards against the privatization and distortion of the work of the Holy Spirit. *The experience of God is deeply personal, but never private.* The personal gift and promise of Christ present in faith "for me" (pro me) always has public implications. The same holds true for spirituality, or the experience of the Spirit's work through the means of grace.

Luther's concept of spirituality

Ultimately, Lutheran Christians are asked to rediscover the term "experience." Martin Luther was a spiritual theologian who referred to experience as the "object" of theology. Swedish theologian Bengt Hoffman describes this Lutheran mode of spirituality as "theology of the heart". Luther's own language about the experience of the Spirit was grounded in earlier traditions of German mysticism, namely Meister Eckhart and Johannes Tauler. He was particularly fond of the 12th century medieval theologian and monastic Bernard of Clairvaux. For Bernard, religious experience was primarily a personal experience that arises from an immediate contact with God. As such, encounters with God lie beyond our rationality. *We cannot fully understand experiences, nor can we conjure them through our own acts or will, no matter how well-intentioned.*

Experiences of God are "passive," meaning they are God's work in us. God takes the initiative to come to us in ways we can perceive. Our words (scripture, preaching, teaching), physical elements like water, wine, bread, prayer, and relationships to others gathered in a fellowship of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving bear God to us. We do not have the capacity to actively express this mystery. Our attempts to do so often create theological confusion or spiritual anxiety. But by God's gracious initiative to be revealed in the means of grace, we perceive the comfort of the Spirit's presence. The disciples on the road to Emmaus recalled "did not our hearts burn" when Christ was revealed in the sharing of the meal.

Luther understood the anxiety about one's own certainty of faith. He frequently describes the unfolding of his personal spirituality as a struggle between God and the human being. In this lifelong process of discipleship and sanctification, Luther proposed a method for nurturing a healthy relationship with the One who created all things seen and unseen. In Luther's "Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings" he names *oratio, meditatio,* and *tentatio*.[10]

Oratio means prayer.

The enlightenment and guidance of the Holy Spirit should be constantly sought in prayer.

Meditatio means meditation or reflection on scriptures.

Our hearts and minds need to be engaged in order to be able to hear the consolation of God within scripture. Luther described the Bible as the cradle and swaddling clothes that hold Christ for us to see. This is a helpful way to distinguish the words of the Bible from the Word of God. Jesus is God's incarnate Word. By reading the words of the Bible and preaching the gospel, the presence of Christ is revealed.

According to the survey, 54 percent of Lutherans meditated on the Bible daily and 34 percent did so weekly. There was a strong confirmation of the Bible as a source of faith that guides discernment of daily life.[11]

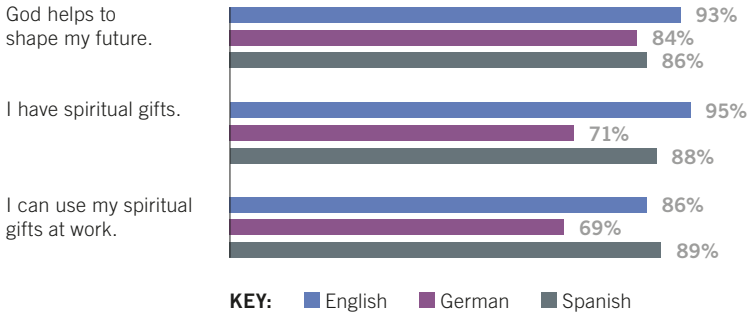
Much like reading scripture, Luther wrote that the sermon never lived "due to words" alone, but due to the experience of the Word (Jesus) through our words. Faith is passive in the sense that Christ's presence is proclaimed to us in word and the sacraments. In his explanation of the third article of the creed in the catechism, Luther explicitly describes this as the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as [the Spirit] calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith." [12]

For Lutherans, meditation on the Word is not only a cognitive exercise of rational understanding. *Meditatio is an invitation to experience the presence of God's Spirit. Luther himself describes how he had this experience while reading the Letter to the Romans. The basis of his decisive Reformation insight is.*[13]

Luther's spirituality is saturated with the concept of experience in order to make clear that religious knowledge should bear active fruit of faith in one's own life. Part of the experience of the real presence of Christ is a joyful exchange in which the *gift of the Spirit* nurtures its fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). *The passive gift and promise that we receive by God's Spirit becomes active in our lives.*

Spiritual gifts



Every baptized person has heard the promise that the Spirit is at work producing fruit in each of us that is expressed through a variety of gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul lists *spiritual gifts* such as wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues, interpretation, teaching, leadership, and forms of assistance. "All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses." (1 Cor 12:11)

Despite the aforementioned skepticism about the Holy Spirit, a high percentage of respondents affirmed having spiritual gifts. Respondents indicate a variety of spiritual gifts for building up the life of their community. The results show that the most frequently named spiritual gifts among the English responses are teaching leadership and preaching. German language respondents most frequently name prayer, listening, and love. The differences raise interesting questions about cultural, ecclesial, or even occupational differences.

Through each person's unique set of spiritual gifts, the love of Christ transforms each of us into "little Christs" for one another. We are called to express our gifts in a variety of services and activities, and the ways in which the church is a place to nurture and mature those gifts. We will also see how the communion of saints helps us discern spiritual experiences and gifts. This public dimension of personal experience points to the final step in a Lutheran spiritual method, tentatio.

Tentatio means testing.

The experience of God's reconciling presence aims to restore right relationships with our neighbors and all creation. Therefore, Luther called us to test our claims against the way they affect our neighbor and creation. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12, spiritual gifts are given "for the common good." Belonging to a common body gives us a community for discernment.

The fellowship of the baptized in the church, communio, plays a significant role in how we express, and guide our personal spirituality. Bernard writes that the external experience of communio helps the individual interpret and understand what they have experienced internally. History and tradition of the church across time and space offers language and authority to help us discern the spirits and spiritual gifts. Communion provides a larger context to make meaning out of our own experiences. *The delicate process of* **tentatio** *creates a balance between the individual's search for identity and the collective wisdom* to prevent abuses and distortions of the Christian tradition.

The Smalcald Articles and other writings within the Lutheran tradition identify several marks of the church such as confession, forgiveness, and the mutual conversation and consolation of faith as ways in which the community can engage in discernment between the individual and the community. Luther emphasized that the individual's conscience should shape the community and its tradition. Likewise, a person's conscience should always be shaped in relationship to the community. The collective wisdom of the church provides a means to guard against the uncritical embrace or interpretation of spiritual gifts, which Martin Luther referred to as "enthusiasm."

Perhaps the roots of any "charismatic suspicion" within the Lutheran tradition lie in this particular struggle. However, Luther did not deny the idea of spiritual gifts or the experience of the Holy Spirit. Luther knew the Holy Spirit keeps communicating the good news of justification by grace through faith in fresh new ways. But he taught that all spiritual gifts had to be tested against the Gospel.

> *Gifts of the Spirit should always liberate and build up in love.*

If this was not the case, the alleged spiritual gift could not be directly attributed to the Lord of Life.

This group of "enthusiasts" claimed to have received special revelations of the Spirit. Luther rejected the idea that individuals have special access to the Spirit that are not available to all humans through the means of grace, including the interpretation of Scripture. *Special revelations could be the grounds for false claims of authority and power* that misuse our liberty and possibly abuse our neighbor.

Today, the spiritual task of *tentatio* remains an important part of the Lutheran tradition. From this perspective, Christians must guard against abuse and distortion of the gospel. Popular discourse about spirituality often focuses on individuals who claim to have received spiritual gifts through special revelations of God's Spirit. We continue to see examples of people using spiritual narratives to create new hierarchies of holiness or political and economic power within the church and society. This is generally referred to as "prosperity gospel." But there are many examples of spiritual manipulation or abuse by those who seek to profit from their claim to special gifts. Some neo-charismatic approaches seek growth by aligning themselves with social and political movements that are contrary to the reconciling, and liberating nature of the gospel.[14] Within this marketplace of spirituality, there are spiritual narratives that are contrary to our Lutheran theological tradition of liberation, equality, and equity.

PROJECT STORIES

During a consultation on Lutheran identity, one participant observed that the spiritual narratives that we were discussing were painful for participants who have had negative experiences in the church. We set aside the time for storytelling about experiences that formed our faith. Stories are not meant to be offered for theological debate. Rather, given and received as gifts. The space was holy, both in the sense that it was set aside for the purpose of gathering in the name of Christ, and in the sense that the community was a place for the Holy Spirit to move among us and knit together a community of trust.

The outcome of this storytelling was astounding. The stories shared and received built bridges between participants who otherwise found themselves on different sides of ethical and ecclesiological divides. Tears were shed. Embraces were exchanged. Communion was experienced. It was faithful *tentatio* that deepened our capacity to know our sisters and brothers in Christ, and their experience of the living God, the Spirit of life.

The results of this process affirm that a general suspicion of spiritual gifts is not a binding legacy for the Lutheran tradition in the 21st century. Luther's writings and polemics require a critical re-reading in light of the way the Lutheran tradition is thriving in the context of cultures and worldviews that do not have such charismatic suspicions. The mutual conversation and consolation of faith across the global communion of Lutheran churches expands the experience of spirituality.

We can affirm that every baptized Christian has received the promise of the gift of the Spirit (*charis*) and can regard themself as spiritually gifted (*charismata*). This study process affirms that this is generally the case across the Lutheran communion.

A first conclusion

Oratio, meditation and tentation are one possible approach to a Lutheran spirituality oriented to Luther's writings. It is important to find a way to cultivate the relationship with God, personally, but also as part of a community. The term "spirituality" only tries to capture this path and give it a sense of framing, bringing together faith and practice, with the gifts of the Spirit as an essential part.

The sections that follow will explore the complex experiences that shape Lutheran identities. We will see how Lutherans experience this dynamic spirituality of faith formation through sacraments, liturgy, theology, relationships with our neighbor and all creation, and acts of loving service.

We will first explore the fundamental basics of our shared Lutheran tradition that include the Bible, confessions, and various theological commitments. Secondly, we will explore traditions and practices that equip us to express faith through worship, public engagement, and vocational fields for service. This approach does not imply that our shared doctrinal and theological tradition is merely theoretical, separate from, or supersedes contextual and cultural traditions. Local practices have always shaped the Tradition at the same time the Tradition shapes our practices. The received tradition and diverse expressions of that tradition belong to one holistic Trinitarian spirituality that forms and transforms our identity.

If the received tradition that unites us is never contextualized or made concrete, it cannot take root or be proclaimed in a meaningful way. And if faith is only informed by our local context and experiences without any connection to a shared tradition or larger communion, we risk domesticating and distorting the gospel. By engaging our shared, received tradition in a cycle of creative dialogue and critical dialectic, we make a space for faithful discernment.

As we explore the spirituality of this living Lutheran tradition, we follow the red thread of the gospel that liberates us to form and reform our Lutheran identities.

Questions for Reflection:

1. *Describe the dynamic between tradition and renewal in your church.*
2. *In what ways is your faith engaged in dialogue with your cultural traditions?*
3. *Where are your experiences of God located? Where and when do you feel the Holy Spirit?*
4. *How do you nourish your relationship with God?*
5. *What is the significance of baptism in your daily life?*

02: A shared tradition: confessions, doctrines, and theologies

Lutherans around the world can speak of a shared identity. Lutherans share a common confessional and theological tradition that is normative for the contours of faith and practice.

This received tradition includes certain marks of what it means to be Lutheran. Yet this received tradition does not prescribe every aspect of what it means to be Lutheran, or preclude a diversity of culturally significant expressions of the tradition.[15] Such prescription would turn the gift into a burden. Our common confessional and theological heritage is a gift that helps us recognize one another as Lutherans among diverse expressions of the ecumenical Christian tradition.

How are Lutherans Christian?

Lutherans confess that we are part of the one, holy, common (catholic), and apostolic church of Jesus Christ. The letter to the Ephesians reminds us that there is one baptism, one faith, one Spirit, one hope and one body of Christ (Eph 4:4-6). Just as there is no separate Lutheran baptism, there is no Lutheran church apart from the one church. The Small Catechism teaches that wherever we are gathered to the preach the Word and administer the sacraments, the Spirit "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth."[16] Being Lutheran does not separate us from all other Christians. The Lutheran tradition offers a faithful way for Christians to express our belonging to Christ and one another.

What makes Christians Lutheran?

Lutherans confess that we receive the good news of belonging to God, the body of Christ, and in this way, all of creation, as a gift and a promise.

> *We confess that we receive the gospel by grace (sola gratia) through faith (sola fide) in Christ (solus Christus).*

This good news, referred to as the doctrine of justification is the heart of the Lutheran Confession. This expression of the gospel (doctrina evangelii) is the grounds of our confessional unity as Lutheran churches. Anyone who can confess this good news can identify as a Lutheran. This open approach to our Lutheran heritage is not a diluted form of doctrine, confession, or ecclesiology. Rather, it is the affirmation of the source of Christian unity, and the consequence of the gospel of liberation that the Lutheran confessional and theological tradition proclaims. Lutherans strive to deepen our faith, hope, and love in ever increasing circles of common life together. Being Lutheran unfolds as we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, participate in sacramental life, and live out our ministry in the world.

The constitution of the Lutheran World Federation recognizes the following as bases for altar and pulpit fellowship among Lutheran churches.

"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."

We will describe in the following the biblical, confessional, spiritual, doctrinal, and theological dimensions of the Lutheran tradition that shape our experience of Christian faith as a communion of churches.

Biblical[17]: Theologians say the Bible is the norm that norms all other norms. That means that the bible is the basis for all of our theological and confessional teaching. *The words of the Bible are a means of grace (charis) for us, because they reveal God's good news.* Scripture bears Christ to us (was Christum treibet). Reading the Bible in a way that reveals the good news requires the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the church across time and space. No one hears or interprets scripture in isolation.

In the context of a plurality of cultures, the question of "what bears Christ" becomes fruitful and challenging. The communion of saints is a space of resonance, in which we discern the dynamic between common and particular interpretations. The global communion of Lutheran churches offers a trans-contextual space to faithfully interpret scripture among a communion of Christians who seek common ground for understanding the role of the Bible in Christian life.

Confessional: The "confessions" refers to a body of writings that expound the good news of Jesus revealed in scripture. Not all Lutheran churches affirm the same confessional writings. Some churches affirm the entire Book of Concord. Some include the Barmen Declaration among their constituting confessions. All member churches of the LWF affirm the 1530 Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism as expositions of the Word of God. The Augsburg Confession was intended to be an ecumenical confession. The Confession did not intend to establish a separate church or denomination. It was a call to reform practices of the church at that time. Lutherans have always been ecumenical and continue to identify where traditions can promote visible Christian unity. The Lutheran confessions guide us deeper into ecumenical dialogue today. Because the confessions expound the gospel of liberty, *Lutherans guard against confessionalism*. "Confessionalism" seeks to establish conditional thresholds or boundaries of belonging. Being "Confessional" is to proclaim the good news of belonging in ways that resist exclusionary or conditional interpretations of the gospel. In order to continue being confessional while avoiding the temptation to confessionalism, Lutherans remain engaged in an interpretive dialogue between the Bible, confessions, church, and culture.

Spiritual: The heart of the Lutheran confession is the good news that humans are justified by grace through faith. *Faith is a gift. Specifically, faith is the work of Jesus at work in us.* The Lutheran confession of the gospel is not merely a statement about the forgiveness of sins. Justification is the daily process of regeneration, sanctification, and renewal of the Holy Spirit in our created bodies.

The Addis Ababa consultation called for a "Christological pneumatology" or "Pneumatological Christology" as the ground and reference for a Trinitarian Lutheran "spirituality." This means, where Christ is present in faith, this is the work of the Holy Spirit. This is the link between spiritual theology and sacramental theology. It is also the ground for our Lutheran commitment to incarnation, and the embodied, being-in-the-world of Lutheran life and ministry. There is no division between "spirit" and "matter." God relates to us through matter in time. The ordinary history and course of life with our neighbor is an arena for the work of the Spirit in our lives. Lutheran spirituality therefore links our justification with justice. We receive God's love in Christ by the Spirit through Word and sacrament (*coram Deo*), and in turn express that love to the world (*coram mundo*) by meeting the needs of our neighbors (*diakonia*) in all common and public sectors of home, society, and all creation. *Lutheran spirituality is mystical and mundane at the same time.*

Doctrinal: From the time of the Reformation, Lutheran reformers have found themselves in the midst of historical, political, philosophical, ecclesial, and theological debates. Out of these debates arose a body of doctrines that orient Lutheran theology. As we have seen, the solae are short phrases that refer to profound doctrinal fields of debate and dialogue. "Christ alone" refers to questions related to salvation. "Faith alone" and "grace alone" refer to the relationship between faith and works. "Word alone" refers to the relationship between the Bible and church teachings, including ecclesial laws, constitutions, and bylaws. These doctrinal fields continue to shape the way Lutherans tend to engage ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. Doctrines also provide principles for Lutherans to discern theological responses to interdisciplinary questions where theology plays a public role in deliberation of ethical matters related to politics, science, technology, economy, ecology, and legal or public policy related to immigration, health, education, human rights, etc.

Theological: These doctrinal principles are expressed through a host of theological commitments that most Lutherans hold in common. For example:

- **Centrality of the Word**: As we have seen, the Word of God can refer to scripture, as contained in the Bible. But the Word of God more specifically refers to Jesus as the incarnation of the Word. Lutherans point to that which bears Christ to us. This refers to sermons and words spoken in sacramental liturgies which refer to Christ. Christ is born to us as gift and promise in confession and absolution, and the mutual conversation and consolation of faith. Our theological understanding of the Word should not be seen as abstract, but rather as the way in which the Spirit of God communicates.
- **Centrality of justification by grace through faith**: The heart of the Lutheran confession is the good news that humans are justified by grace through faith. However, the doctrine of justification is more than a verbal pronouncement of forgiveness. Justification is a process by which the Spirit bears fruit of faith as we participate in the new creation.
  - A robust doctrine of faith invites us to consider the real presence of Christ in faith by the Holy Spirit where the gospel is proclaimed, and sacraments administered.
  - We are called to explore the link between grace (*charis*) and gifts (*charismata*).
  - Lutherans affirm the relationship between justification and justice. Those who are justified by the love of God in Christ Jesus (*coram Deo*) are called and compelled to do go out and do justice. The expressionof love at work in the world (*coram mundo*) is not merely an ethical realm, but it is the work of the Spirit in us, bearing fruits of love that is often referred as “sanctification”.

- **Centrality of Gospel**: Luther's focus on the gospel was partly initiated by his anxiety about the status of his relationship to God. Luther was never in doubt of God's presence. But his question was, is God terrifying (*mysterium tremendum*), or gracious? Theologians have always asked questions about the nature of God. In the early church, theologians preferred to think of the difference between creatures and God in terms of nature and grace. Many medieval theologians thought in terms of reason and revelation. *One of the reformers' most significant contributions was to explore the relationship between the Creator and creatures in terms of law and gospel*. The proper understanding of law and gospel does not distinguish between the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, or between individual verses that legislate rules versus those that speak of Jesus. Rather, Law and Gospel is a way of discerning the effect of the Word on the listener. Law can be heard and experienced as true and right by all humans, and therefore be a guide to shape societies. But law also acts as a mirror that unmasks our sin and reminds us of our inability to fulfil God's law. On the other hand, the gospel must be revealed. The promise of a loving, comforting God cannot be discerned by reason, or known through philosophical and scientific pursuits. The gospel must be communicated to us through preaching, or proclamation. Law condemns while gospel comforts. Law instructs, while gospel liberates. *Law is conditional, while gospel is an unconditional gift and promise*. The law can coerce societies to reduce injustice, while justification by grace through faith compels people to love. Love fulfils the law.
    - The importance of law and gospel has significant implications today, especially when we consider the anxiety and mental health crises. We see social implications of the gospel when we consider the pushback against legal structures of democratic governance, and distrust of human rights conventions and mechanisms of justice.
    - Gospel proclamation may find new avenues of expression in light of growing appreciation for diverse cultural forms of storytelling, communication, aesthetics, and the spoken word.

- **Centrality of the cross**: When Lutherans proclaim Christ, we proclaim Christ crucified. *The crucified and resurrected Christ is the wisdom of the Gospel that confounds and transforms the world*. In the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518, Luther uses the expression "Theology of the Cross" to denote the liberating insight that the fullest revelation of God takes place in Jesus's historical suffering on the cross, not in divine glory. The implications of a theology of the cross are profound.
  - A theology of the cross reveals the good news of God's solidarity and loving presence in the midst of anxiety, suffering, and death. No creature is forsaken.
  - A theology of the cross is able to unmask and speak truth about injustice, powers, and spirits of the age, such as prevailing economic and political theories.
  - A theology of the cross discerns the distinction between revelation and reason, and equips us to engage in intercultural and interdisciplinary dialogue. A theology of the cross helps Lutherans pivot from conversations about faith and works, toward faith and reason. This expands our theological contribution to public discourse.
- **Centrality of the Word and sacraments**: Lutherans confess that Baptism, and the Lord's Supper are sacraments. Confession and absolution are also sacramental. According to Article XIII of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, a sacrament is a rite that has God's command and bears the promise of grace in ways that humans can understand. St. Augustine called a sacrament a visible word. We might add a word that can be perceived through our senses.
  - Our sacramental theology also invites us to reconsider ecology and creation care in light of the fact that the finite can hold the infinite *(finitum capax infinitii*).
  - The real presence of Christ in water, bread, wine, and word opens the eyes of our hearts to the ubiquitous, or replete, presence of God throughout the cosmos.

- **Centrality of Christian liberty**: One of Luther's first reformatory treatises was on the topic of Christian liberty. Luther challenged the power structures of his day with the simple paradox that justification by grace through faith means a Christian is perfectly free, servant of none, and at the same time, a dutiful servant, perfectly bound in loving service to all.[18] *The law of love continues to challenge modern concepts of freedom, liberty, justice, and economic and legal systems.* At the same time, Luther's challenge to concepts of power led to the notion of the priesthood of the baptized, which alters the church's understanding of ministry. The Lutheran approach to Christian liberty offers:
  - a fresh understanding of the relationship between church, society, and state
  - a way to speak about the vocation of baptized Christians to minister in every sector
  - a way to reimagine every realm of life as a place to express holiness through Christian love
  - a way to challenge systems of domination, with relational models of love

Lutherans hold many other shared theological commitments. Among them are: The human as both saint and sinner (*simul justus et peccator*), under the sign of the opposite (*sub contrario*), the doctrine of two kingdoms and three realms, a doctrine of sin as being turned inward on oneself (*in curvatus in se*), and many others. One participant remarked that being Lutheran means "a strong heritage of biblical and confessional education, critical thinking, and passing down the faith to new generations".

A Lutheran grammar and vocabulary for intercultural faith

The shared commitments that set the norms for our Lutheran identity can be viewed in different ways. It may be helpful to understand them in terms of grammar and vocabulary. Theology provides a basic grammar that should be recognizable in Lutheran preaching and life across cultures. The law is conditional, and speaks in conditional grammar of "If…then.". "If you fulfil this task, then you will receive your reward." Lutherans proclaim the gospel in a grammar of grace that frees hearts to bear the fruit of God's creative love in the world. The gospel is proclaimed in the gracious grammar of, "because…therefore." "Because you have been justified by grace through faith, therefore, you are free to love God, your neighbor, and all creation."

Theology also offers a vocabulary for talking about our experience of life and faith. The vocabulary of faith can seem foreign or difficult for many. This is partly because vocabulary is highly subjective and varies between cultures. Certain questions may not be asked in all cultures, and every culture has its own vocabulary, concepts, and contexts by which people make meaning. *Therefore, Lutherans recognize that theological "vocabulary" can be different across the global communion.*

Translating theology between cultures is not only a matter of words and grammar. Theology is a way of thinking about God and the universe that is deeply dependent upon the patterns of thought and ways of making meaning of the people and lands who are thinking theologically. Christianity has always been contextualized through culturally-determined languages and worldviews.

Contextualizing the Lutheran confession requires a sensitive dedication to *intercultural theology, which was described in the LWF's Commitments on the Ecumenical Way to Ecclesial Communion:*

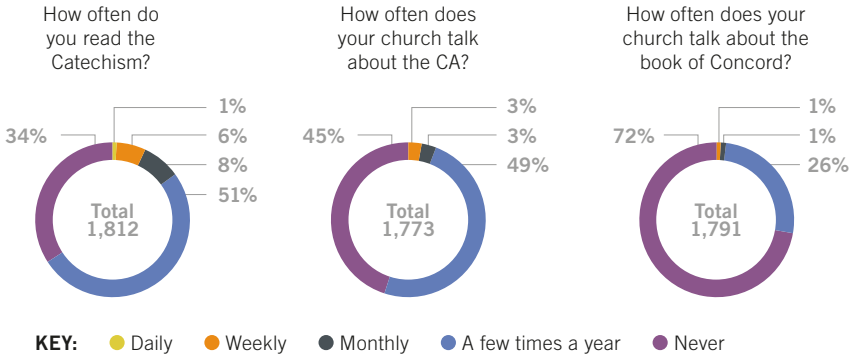
"New perspectives and approaches to communicating the Christian message in words and deeds also require addressing issues arising from colonialism, violation of human rights, gender injustice, and mistakes made in pursuing mission. In the course of mission, entire cultures have been denounced. Some forms of the contextualization of the gospel have resulted in ethnocentrism and tended towards a monoculture. As a global and polycentric communion, Lutherans need to embrace positive contextualization that critically acknowledges and respects cultures and contexts." [19]

Decolonizing the Lutheran confessional tradition in a way that liberates requires building relationships of trust, respect and mutuality between people who can sustain dialogue for the sake of understanding. Rooted in the notion of Christian liberty, the Lutheran tradition should be translated into different languages, and through the thought patterns and perspectives of different worldviews. Faith formation should also respect different cultural forms of teaching and learning.

Aboriginal Lutherans on the Australian continent have been long engaged in a process of intercultural theology. Djiniyini Gondarra commented, "The Reformation gave Western culture the freedom to explore that dialogue [between faith and culture] in many directions. The Western church has not, in turn, given that same freedom to Aboriginal People to explore that dialogue through their own culture. We now want to, and must, explore that culture." [20]

Being familiar with the foundational components of the theological tradition equips us to engage in intercultural or contextual theology. However, the global survey demonstrated that the majority of youth and adults do not consistently engage the catechism or confessional writings.

Confessions



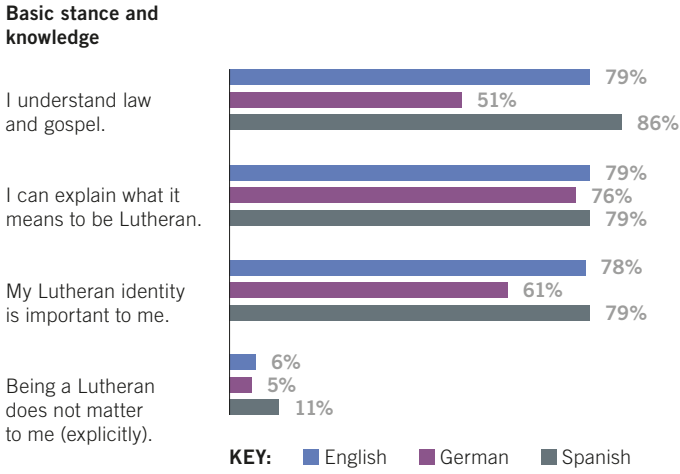
The charts above present response to questions asked in the survey.

1. How often do you read the Catechism? 1,812 respondents reported: 1% daily, 6% weekly, 8 % monthly, 51% a few times per year, 34% never
2. How often does your church talk about the Augsburg Confession? 1,773 respondents reported, 0% daily, 3% weekly, 3% monthly, 49% a few times per year, 45% never
3. How often does your church talk about the Book of Concord?

These responses encourage our churches to do more to engage members with the confessional writings and catechism, so that each generation can rediscover the tradition. However, nearly 75 percent of the participants report that they can explain what it means to be Lutheran, and articulate the meaning of several key Lutheran doctrines such as law contrasted with gospel; justification; priesthood of the baptized, etc.

The importance of theological education and formation

This result suggests that respondents are acquiring functional theologies through the course of their life of faith. Faith formation occurs through various processes of formal and information education, and for this reason, Lutherans have always placed a high priority on theological education and formation in the living liturgy of the church and academy. In his 1530 "Sermon on Keeping Children in School", Luther was clear that the aim of education is not to develop certain skills that are useful for generating wealth.



The charts above present response to questions asked in the survey.

Rather, education serves to transform individuals regardless of social location, so that they can contribute to public welfare and peace through whatever vocation they are called to serve.

Lutherans often include commitments to lifelong theological education and formation in our baptismal rights, as our liturgy, the ministry of the Word through worship and study, and gathering around the means of grace are formative parts of Christian education. The experiences of the liturgy, preaching, sacramental community and Christian education are the grounds from which the grammar of grace is gleaned, and functional theologies are formed in all the baptized, whether implicitly or explicitly. For many who feel called to vocations in the lay or ordained ministry within the church, theological education continues in specific ways through various academic programs of formal theological education and ministerial formation. The Lutheran tradition grew out of this dialogue and dialectic between church and academy. For Lutherans, theological education as a means to pass down the tradition is never merely academic. Theological education is part of a spirituality of lifelong baptismal formation.

In his 1520 letter "To the Christian Nobility" Luther made various proposals about education aimed mostly at university level education. But in his 1524 treatise "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany, That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools" Luther gave a strong defense of the need to strengthen primary education.

At a time when his theological perspective on the priesthood of all believers was being interpreted as devaluing classical education because of its association with preparation for the priesthood, Luther advocated for well-educated citizens who could fully and constructively contribute to the life of the church and the cohesion of a peaceful society.

Children are often taught the Bible, catechisms, and basics of faith through programs of Christian education and confirmation. But the grammar of the gospel can be formed or intuited through homelife, and a community engaged in acts of service. There is a deeply experiential aspect to learning the theological truths. We can teach people about love, or we can love them.

This pedagogical reality invites congregations to be creative with methods of Christian education. Christian education should be contextualized to respond to local and traditional ways of passing on wisdom. This is particularly significant for Indigenous peoples. But every church can rediscover and adapt Lutheran theological commitments, confessions, and the catechism in culturally significant vocabulary, methods of meaning making, and competent practices of teaching and learning.

PROJECT STORIES

In North America, a group of African-descent Lutheran theologians broadened the interpretation of Luther's Small Catechism in ways that reflect the historical, cultural, and linguistic experience of Lutherans of African descent on the African continent and in diaspora. As part of the current Lutheran identity study process, Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute in Chennai deployed teaching faculty across 10 out of 12 churches in the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India (UELCI) to teach and learn with local leaders in the context of Dalit and Adivasi/Tribal Lutherans in the Hindi, Tamil, Telegu, and other native languages.

Culturally responsive pedagogies will invite members to pose meaningful questions and create new expressions of our living tradition that can connect the gospel to contemporary problems. This may be particularly helpful in discerning questions of human rights, care for creation, gender, sexuality, artificial intelligence, and the social, political, and economic spirits of the age.

Conclusion

Lutherans affirm a shared confessional and theological tradition. It is important to remember that the Lutheran tradition is always related to the lived experience of God's liberating work in the world and aimed at the practical dimensions of a faithful life. As one German language respondent expressed, "Between too much legalism on the one hand and too much emotionality on the other, there is this path of freedom that is oriented toward God's word […]. The gospel is to be brought up so that it reaches the people of today and they can gain access to it."

Questions for Reflection:

1. *In your culture, what has the capacity to bear Christ to us?*
2. *In what ways can your church express faith in creative and beautiful ways in your context?*
3. *How do you experience the link between grace (charis) and gifts (charismata)?*
4. *How do you express the link between justification and justice in your context?*
5. *How does the Lutheran tradition help you address problems of mental health or exclusion in your society?*

03: "Varieties of experience": Word, sacraments, service and the tentatio of life

Lutheran identity is not informed solely by a set of theological commitments. Lutheran identity describes a way of being in the world. Lutheran identity is formed by the lived spirituality, in the experience of God's Spirit at work, continually creating, reconciling, and sustaining social and biological relationships.

The experience of Word and sacrament

A keyword analysis across all language responses to the global survey shows that the words most used to describe Lutheran traditions are "worship" and "communion." Results show that people feel liturgy is highly significant for faith formation. The proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments remain central to the Lutheran assembly and the formation of a Lutheran identity. Liturgy connects the beauty of worship with the daily experiences of personal and social life. The ministry of Word, sacrament, and service offers a gracious invitation to a lived spirituality.

In the Lutheran tradition, the church is a starting point for religious experience. The Large Catechism describes the church (*ecclesia*) in the following way.

"The word ecclesia properly means nothing more than an assembly in German. But we are accustomed to using the word Kirche, which the common people understand not as an assembled group of people, but as a consecrated house or building. But the house would not be called a church if it were not for a single reason that the group of people come together in it. […] Therefore, […] it ought to be called 'a Christian community or assembly,' or best and most clearly of all, 'a holy Christian people.'"[21]

The church is a living, sacramental community in which people can experience Christianity as a way of life and a path of discipleship. The practices of Christian worship are an invitation to the experiential dimension of faith. Christians belong through Baptism, not theological examination. The creed is not a checklist for faith but praise of a Divine mystery. Communion is not a meal for the holy, but a divine gift of the holy that is shared in ordinary (*sub contrario*) bread and wine.

In Lutheran Christianity, the experiential dimension of faith is grounded in this communication of the holy in the ordinary (*finitum capax infinitii*). Participants in the study process described worship as an experience of "holy ordinariness." Luther describes this ordinary holiness in the Small Catechism, namely the explanation of the third article of the creed. Luther writes that the church is:

"[…] on earth a holy little flock and community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. […] The Holy Spirit will remain with the holy community or Christian people until the Last Day. Through it [the Spirit] gathers us, using it to teach and preach the Word. By it [the Spirit] creates and increases holiness, causing it daily to grow and become strong in the faith and in its fruits, which the Spirit produces."[22]

In your local parish you will find Baptism, preaching, teaching, singing, prayer, praise, and thanksgiving in sacramental fellowship with the neighbor, stranger, and even the enemy. In the local gathering around Word and sacrament, the Spirit finds you and gives you the gift of the presence of Christ who forms your faith. This is the connection between justification and sanctification.

Lutheran worship

Liturgy and the rituals of common worship are means for humans to experience belonging to God and to the community of faith that we call the church. The study process affirmed that Lutherans value the role liturgy plays in affirming this sense of belonging. In response to the question "How often do you attend worship or receive the sacrament of Holy Communion?" over 86 percent responded that they participated weekly. Participants expressed the significance of worship in the following ways:

- "My church is home for my soul. It nourishes my heart. I take our values of humility, gratitude and generosity to heart, and our open and loving acceptance of all people."
- "I feel like being part of a global family of believers."
- "I feel connected to God and others through the participatory nature of our worship service. It helps me feel connected to my past and my ancestors. I feel we are allowed to think for ourselves."

Word and sacraments are central to worship because they proclaim the gospel (justification by grace through faith, doctrina evangelii). Article V of the Augsburg Confession states:

"To obtain faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake."

The Spirit is present *in*, *with*, and *under* the outward signs of our shared words, water, bread, and wine. They are the means of grace by which the Spirit makes Christ present to the congregation. *Our liturgy is the instrument of this sacramental dimension of experiential faith*. One respondent affirmed, "I like being part of a denomination that deeply values the sacraments and believes in the physical presence of Christ in the elements of Communion." Real presence is key for understanding the role of liturgy in faith formation in the Lutheran tradition.

The means of grace say what they do and do what they say. They communicate the gift of Christ and reconcile us into a community where we experience what is promised.

The experience of God's presence in our time and space through worship shapes our worldview and forms our faith. Participants recognized that while the inbreaking of God's spirit shapes our identities, the way that worship is expressed through local traditions, language, music and material culture in turn shapes the Lutheran tradition of worship. A previous LWF study process on worship and culture. The process explored how Lutherans proclaim Christ in different cultures, recognizing that asking questions about worship and culture is at once to deal with the heart of Christian life. Questions of "inculturation" affect people's primary Christian experience and their spirituality. The process resulted in the 1994 Nairobi Statement[23], and was later expanded in the book Worship and Culture: Foreign Country or Homeland?[24] One contributor wrote: "The message must first embrace us and speak not only to our brains and senses but also our hearts. In order for this to happen it must be incarnated in the life of the people and their culture, just as it took root in one specific culture for the first time."

Lutheran liturgy follows ecumenical consensus regarding the order (ordo) and shape of Christian worship to ensure the apostolic nature of the tradition, particularly, the words of institution of sacraments. However, grounded in the commitment to Christian liberty, Lutherans can contextualize worship without threatening unity. Article VII of the Augsburg Confession affirms: "And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel (doctrina evangelii) and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." (Eph 4:5-6).

Worship can be a place to express diverse experiences of faith through the aesthetics of music dance, poetics, and the visual or plastic arts. When Luther wrote that next to the word of God, music is the gift most highly to be praised, he was pointing to an integral link between Word and music. The promise of peace with God is the source of our hope for peace with people and the planet. Music has the capacity not only to proclaim this good news in poetry, but to resonate in our bodies when we sing in harmony. So, too, do other theological aesthetics.

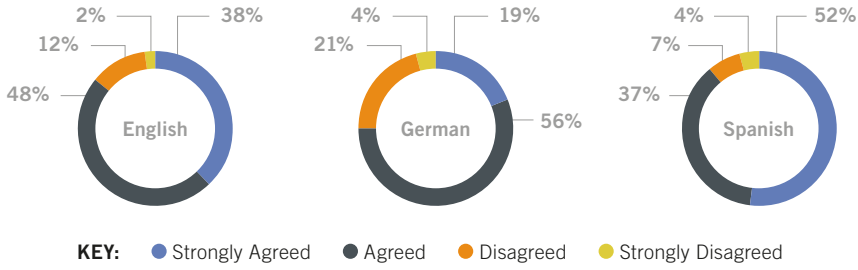
During the study process, members of Nordkirche (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria engaged in a three-part conversation that began with a poetry slam. This creative, poetic engagement around storytelling created new avenues of reflection between the North and South of Germany.

We bring our bodies and cultures into the assembly where we are "re-membered" as the body of Christ in ways that resonate with meaning. The embodied aspect of liturgy makes it important for Lutherans to approach questions of worship through the lens of intercultural theology. The study process on Lutheran Identity affirmed the importance of intercultural dialogue as being particularly true with respect to the culture and practices of Indigenous peoples, and generally true with respect to inculturation and translating Word and sacrament into accessible, meaningful forms.

Lutherans belonging to the Massai, Sámi, and Oglala Lakota Sioux peoples participated in the study process. Among the 2,800 respondents, 43 percent indicated that Indigenous or traditional beliefs and cultural practices inform their thoughts about God's Spirit.

Through inter-cultural dialogue and expression, Indigenous and other cultural traditions shape our worship and awareness of the way that God's Spirit communicates in worship. However, many say that they cannot always express their identities in the context of their congregations. The results call Lutherans to understand worship as cultural expression. This critical task is key for the self-understanding of local churches, and for people on the move who meet in diasporic communities, sometimes called "migrant churches."

Do church rituals and traditions give me helpful perspectives about current events in the world?



The charts above present response to questions asked in the survey.

Worship can also be a place to engage public and interdisciplinary issues that we face through creative dialogue and critical dialectic. Liturgy and music have a prophetic dimension of providing a sacramental context that can inspire theological and moral imagination. Technical and legal approaches to issues like climate change, environmental protection, migration, and racism often fail to motivate people to political or behavioral change. But the liturgical art of worship offers language and rituals that embrace our profound anxieties and embody our aspirations for a new creation. Liturgy can free our theological and sacramental imagination and provide the space to publicly express counter-cultural expressions of Christian hope in the midst of the gathered community.

PROJECT STORIES

One example of this dialogical role of Word and sacraments is the worship held at the November 2021 Church of Sweden's General Synod Assembly at Uppsala Cathedral and at the October 2022 Sámi church conference in Luleå. In the context of worship, the Church of Sweden apologized to the country's Sámi community for centuries of "mistreatment and complacency," including "nomad" schools that suppressed Sámi culture and language, and separated children from their families. The Sámi Council of the Church of Sweden later agreed that the formal apology in the context of worship offered the first step toward reconciliation between the Church of Sweden and the Sámi people.

PROJECT STORIES

Another example can be found in creation-centered liturgies during the Season of Creation. Each year congregations across the LWF hold outdoor liturgies of holy communion to raise awareness of the effects of climate change on affected ecologies and marginalized communities. Sharing this sacrament in the context of local ecologies proclaims the good news for all creation, in spiritual solidarity with all creatures. Sometimes elements of creation are brought into worship spaces, which accentuates the elemental nature of the sacraments in water, bread, wine, bodies, and breath.

One Spanish speaker commented during a Season of Creation webinar on the importance of creating engaging liturgical spaces. "I believe that the church must find a way to manifest its identity outside of the sanctuaries, so that people who are not Lutherans see and feel in themselves the benefits of being Lutheran. Not only [for] solidarity but also generating attractive spaces where our thoughts, our vision of God and our openness can be expressed. It is common for people who casually come into contact with our church to be surprised by our thinking, but I believe that this contact should not be casual. As an Evangelizing church, we must seek to generate those spaces."

Worship is embodied; therefore, liturgy is highly catechetical. Over 70 percent of survey respondents across all languages agreed that "worship forms my Lutheran identity." The consultation recognized that worship as a central, lived spirituality affects the formation of children, as well as people who cannot read, and neurodiverse people. Yet only 29 percent strongly agreed that children and young people are central to the life of their congregation.

"Varieties of Service": The experience of Word and Service

In addition to a focus on the experience of Word and sacraments, Lutherans speak about the connection between Word and service. In 1 Corinthians 12:5, Paul writes, "there are varieties of services, but the same Lord."

We have seen how we passively receive the gift of Christ's righteousness from God (*coram Deo*) by grace through faith in our worship (*leiturgia*) through proclamation of the Word (*kerygma*) and sacraments. Having received that gift, we are sent out to actively bear the fruit of loving service to the world (*coram mundo*) through public witness (*martyria*) and service (*diakonia*). One participant responded, "We embrace a horizontal faith that is in the world as we follow where Christ leads us. We are a visible sign of Christ's love who often feel outside of that embrace."

Diakonia:

God's creative, reconciling and sustaining work is the horizon that gives meaning to the ways we serve our neighbor and seek justice in the public space for the wellbeing of all the Earth.

The word "diakonia" occurs over one hundred times in Christian scriptures. In Luke 22:27, Jesus tells the disciples, "I am among you as one who serves." Service is at the heart of Christ's mission and the heart of the church's mission. Acts 6:1-17 recounts the story of the early church, calling Stephen and the first deacons. Service is one of the spiritual gifts (*charismata*) and the church recognizes the particular ministry of those called to serve as a constituent part of the church's ministry. In other words, diakonia is not something that the church does. Diakonia is a constituent part of the church.

> *For Lutherans, safeguarding the needs and wellbeing of the neighbor is part of a two-fold ethic of love: Love God and love your neighbor as yourself.*

This ethic of love is at the heart of Luther's writings, on the Freedom of a Christian and Luther's writings on the two kinds of righteousness. The incarnation of Jesus points to the inherent dignity of each body, and God's love frees us to meet the needs of each body, with a particular emphasis on those who are excluded and marginalized.

Diaconal action is often direct action that meets material needs. But diakonia is more than social action or development. Insofar as our work for justice is a response to the good news of our justification, *diaconal service is an integral part of a holistic Lutheran Christian spirituality.*

Diakonia has an *eschatological dimension*. We work to transform the world out of Christian hope that we are participating in God's mission to reconcile and transform cosmic relations. The inequity of wealth and power with which some groups dominate others distorts our life together. In the Small Catechism, Luther explains what it means for Christians to pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. We pray that it may come in our lives. And we serve in a way that embodies faith, hope, and love in all our relationships.

Diakonia has an *ecumenical*, interfaith, and interdisciplinary dimension. Because our baptismal vocation to serve all beings is rooted in a fundamental theological claim about the inherent dignity and goodness of every creature, Lutherans find pathways to join all people of good will in seeking the common good, justice, and peace. Ecumenical, interfaith, and interdisciplinary partnerships are pathways to peace, especially where Lutherans are a religious, cultural, or social minority.

Diakonia also has a *prophetic dimension*. The Lutheran tradition emerged during a time of pandemic, social, economic, and political unrest. The reformation of the education system and transformation of socio-political systems went hand in hand with sharp critiques of the power dynamics that created or perpetuated injustice. As we serve to meet the needs of people and planet, we critique the systemic causes of injustice.

The LWF calls this approach "prophetic diakonia". A 2002 report from an LWF consultation in Johannesburg states: "… while diakonia begins as unconditional service to the neighbor in need, it leads inevitably to social change that restores, reforms and transforms. We must challenge all theological interpretations that do not take seriously the suffering of the world. As Lutheran churches, we are shaped by a theology of the cross, which compels us to identify with and for the suffering, rather than the successful. A theology of the cross calls things what they really are, moving beyond politeness and pretense, breaking the silence and taking the risk of speaking truth to power even when this threatens the established order and results in hardship or persecution. This is at the heart of the prophetic diaconal calling."

There are hundreds of registered Lutheran diaconal and humanitarian service organizations around the globe. Many are ministries of LWF member churches, and many are private agencies that are supported by Lutherans. At the local level, Lutheran churches support schools and private education systems. Congregations engage in programs for child and family support, feeding and housing ministries, prison ministry and clinics that provide direct service and promote access to public health. Lutherans engage in farm ministries that improve economic justice and food sovereignty through practices that care for the land and all creatures. Churches run hospitals, pastoral care, and psycho-social support. Churches are involved in refugee ministry and immigration services, serving as host communities, or assisting in resettlement and advocacy from local communities to our global leadership in the humanitarian sector through LWF World Service. The scope and history of Lutheran humanitarian and social service is vast. The millions of Lutherans sharing God's love in holistic care for their neighbor's body, mind, soul, and livelihoods are an icon of Lutheran spirituality.

Seventy-four percent of respondents to the global survey believe that church is a place that promotes well-being and healing. These numbers bear witness to the strong diaconal identity among Lutheran churches, and a commitment to making their churches inclusive communities. One participant summarized: "I am proud that my church believes in justice and takes action."

However, several respondents also commented negatively about the quality of their church's engagement in public space. One exemplary comment read, "It seems my church has become more of a social services agency than a pastoral care community." We need to reinforce the theological and spiritual link between the gospel and the vocation to serve.

"Varieties of activities": diverse vocations, traditions, and the tentatio of life

In 1 Corinthians 12:6, Paul writes, "and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone." Across the global communion, we experience diverse activities and faith practices. How can we understand diversity as being a vital part of our shared identity? The Trinity is an icon of a relationship of love, and creation reflects that wisdom of the Triune God. Diversity is woven into the very architecture of creation. Luther writes in the Large Catechism: "For here we see how the Father has given himself with all creation and has abundantly provided for us in this life."[25] *We experience the diversity of creation in the modalities of state, church, and family, and in a fourth estate, ecology.* We share the same sun, earth, moon, and Spirit that animates our life as individuals and our life together.

Lutherans reflect the diversity of the created order. We are born into particular contexts with different languages, unique ways of making meaning, and myriad practices for marking significant moments in life. Our contexts include the signs, symbols, languages, values, and practices of religious and cultural contexts around the world. Lutheranism is always coming alongside other traditions. These interactions invite us to discern how the Lutheran tradition can and cannot incorporate diverse traditions in particular contexts. This dialogue requires relationships with those who are fluent in both Christianity and the language, rituals, and worldviews of other traditions. Lutheran identities are differently formed by the contexts in which the word of justification meets us.

Tentatio of life

Lutherans affirm many traditions that are part of this life, which God declared is good. Being Lutheran should never deny our culture but integrate and orient our lives around the gospel. Yet, it is important to be self-reflective, and engage lived cultures in dual modes of creative dialogue and critical dialectic with the Lutheran tradition. *Part of a Lutheran mode of being in the world involves discerning the activities of daily life*. This process can be described as the *tentatio* of life. The consultation recognized the value of a pastoral approach to theological reflection that values the experiences of lived traditions as theologically significant.

Many imagine intercultural encounters entail conflict. But Luther defines *tentatio* as "the touchstone which teaches you not only to know and understand, but also how to experience how right, true, sweet, lovely, mighty, comforting God's Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom."[26] *Tentatio* should reflect the wisdom of God's gracious Word. Grace is transgressive, in that it crosses boundaries and bridges gaps. Grace bridges the gap between the Divine other and creation. The grace (*charis*) of the Spirit, received in our baptism, helps us bridge the gap between our Lutheran identities and identities of other belonging with wisdom and understanding.

Through the lens of baptism engagements with other traditions shifts from intercultural anxiety or conflict to a way to discern our vocational call to live between catholicity (*the perennial tradition*) and contextuality. Baptism is a sacrament of belonging. The question of how we belong in the world is a lifelong process of discerning our baptismal vocation.

The survey asked Lutherans to reflect on the relationship between their baptism and their sense of belonging in the world. Nearly 50 percent of respondents confirmed they think about their baptism every day, while 25 percent ranked it on a weekly basis. Responding to the statement, "I can express my cultural, ethnic, Indigenous, or ancestral traditions in my church," 48 percent agreed, and 38 percent strongly agreed. More than half of respondents strongly agreed, and another third agreed with the statement, "I feel free to be myself in church." This affirmation of baptismal belonging in the context of diverse expressions is quite positive.

However, with respect to high levels of exclusion and marginalization of racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities, short answer responses call for more work to be done to make safe, inclusive communities. One youth from Latin America commented, "Yes, I can be myself at church. But I think it could be even more open so that other people can be themselves in the church. In my region, if we look at the presence of young people in services, it is scarce. Perhaps people of other ethnicities than white would not feel comfortable in a church that started with immigrants […]. Even though today there is some 'openness that is not so open', yet."

PROJECT STORIES

Lutheran churches in the Nordic region launched a multi-phase project that focuses on "Baptism in Times of Change." Webinars, consultations, bibliographic research, and curated resources point to several points of learning. The need for new forms of baptismal practice and liturgical development, communication and education, theological questions about accessibility, discipleship, and mission were among the key findings. In the category of church in wider society, churches are recommended "to view Nordic societies as inviting us to theologize contextually", "to learn to be churches in a pluralistic society sharing public space and working together with people of other convictions," and "to consider profound social changes transforming societies as a renewed call to be churches in mission." This description of baptismal calling is an invitation to vocation.

One priesthood, diverse vocations

In the Small Catechism, Luther describes the work of the Holy Spirit using the verbs call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify. From the Latin verb "to call," vocation was a point of emphasis for Luther and early Lutherans. *For Lutherans, both clergy and laity are called to participate equally in God's mission*, through common but differentiated roles within the priesthood of all the baptized.

Jesus is the high priest, and all Christians share in the priesthood by virtue of our baptism into Christ. Our vocation is a response to the Spirit who calls us to bear the fruit of faith in the diverse sectors of our lives each day. We negotiate our identities as citizens of a divine realm and as social beings embedded in the earthly realm. We belong to webs of relationships with families, societies, nations, and ecologies in which every Christian can express their belonging to a common priesthood of all the baptized. Every sector of life becomes a venue for faithfully expressing our "ordinary holiness" through our diverse political, social, familial, and ecological relationships.

This vocational doctrine of the two realms helps guard against spiritualizing politics and politicizing religion. But the history of Lutheran churches reveals the ambiguities of expressing faith through our political identities. From the beginning of the Reformation, Lutherans held social order and civic authority in high esteem. This confidence in social order led to strong church structures, and stable democracies with thriving social welfare systems in many countries. On the other hand, by deferring questions of the law to civic authorities in matters of legal justice, some churches relinquished their critical distance from state structures of power. In many cases, such as the church's participation in the colonial expansion of nation states and empires, churches and Christians did not maintain a critical relationship their governments, or worse, willingly participated in the abuse of power against people and lands. This deferential modesty toward civic authority often quieted the church's prophetic voice in situations of war, colonization, genocide, apartheid, slavery, and other injustices.

Today, Lutherans affirm that civil society and politics are a realm of Christian vocation because they concern the common good. When thinking about the notion of two realms in modern democratic societies, Christians are called to be involved in the realm of state because by virtue of our citizenship. Some Christian traditions teach that belonging to the body of Christ means we should resist identifying as a member of a political body.

However, because citizens constitute the political "body" of modern nation states, the civic and political realm is a realm of vocation in which we can work for the justice, peace and common good of our neighbors. It should be noted that our civic engagement in the context of modern nation states is quite different from Luther's time, when it was arguably easier to distinguish between the spheres of influence between the church and the prince.

Contemporary concepts of citizenship must take into consideration notions of social belonging that do not exclude or discriminate according to culture or creed. Ethno-nationalist political or cultural practices based on religious, racial, or gender-based exclusion cannot be part of a Lutheran identity because they are contrary to the gospel and Christ's ministry of reconciliation of creation.[27] Wherever we encounter systems of oppression that operate with a logic of exclusion, *Lutherans claim the freedom and responsibility to reform and transform those systems.*

In this sense, Luther was a liberation theologian. When people were burdened by systems of unjust power, he was compelled to translate scripture and write catechisms to teach that justification by faith through God's grace freed us to reform those systems. The reformation of the political, economic, and ecclesial systems in the 16th century unleashed new political, philosophical, and economic systems that we continue to resist and reform today. But the understanding of baptismal vocation that links justification and justice remains a hallmark of Lutheran identity.

A respondent from Latin America said, "I think church and justice are part of each other, the church must fight for justice so everyone has a dignified life. It has the role of announcing and denouncing any type of injustice and oppression. Lutheran churches need to preach freedom and not slavery."

Thirty-nine percent of survey respondents across all the regions agree and another 48 percent strongly agree with the statement that "Being baptized informs the way I participate in society or politics."

The connection between justification and justice calls Lutherans to bear prophetic, public witness to matters of liberty, well-being, and dignity of life in all social and political sectors. A previous LWF Study Document on the Church in the Public Space[28], describes how our baptismal vocation calls Lutherans to contribute to the ongoing reform of social and civil society with patience, persistence, solidarity, and empowerment.

One respondent stated, "Among the challenges for Lutherans are: being a prophetic church that not only preaches what people want to hear, but what it actually has to preach … being a church with feet [on the ground], being a church that walks alongside the people and defends their rights."

Part of the baptismal vocation to walk alongside people means living out our Christian faith through our daily work. The priesthood of all the baptized helps us see the home, family, and all professions as venues to express the "ordinary holiness" Christian vocation. The ordinary liturgies of life are part of our daily worship.

Luther wrote many pastoral letters and sermons to help people understand how to live out their vocation through their professions and homelife. In his sermon on the Estate of Marriage, Luther praised the way that all vocations in life can be expressions of holiness. Luther chooses the profoundly mundane example of changing a child's diapers to illustrate the joyful spirit of Christian faith expressed in daily practices.

Luther's Small Catechism is an illustration of the significance of homelife. The catechism is a tool to teach the meaning of the Ten Commandments, the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the sacrament of baptism, confession and absolution, and the sacrament of Holy Communion. It includes scriptures and prayers for different roles and table graces for use in the home. *The Small Catechism interprets the meaning of faith in ways that apply to daily life*. While the content needs to be interpreted for different times and cultural contexts, the teachings affirm that practices and traditions of daily life are venues for holiness.

Even more, as a tool designed to be used in the home, the home-based method of faith formation becomes an experience of sanctifying home life and social relationships.

Lutherans are called to justice

The survey results below illustrate the way Lutherans have a strong sense that the course of their daily life, their occupations, and their relationships are vocational spaces.

- 87% strongly agree, and another 13% agree that "The Holy Spirit gives me energy for my interests in life."
- 45% of respondents strongly agree, and another 41% agree with the statement that "being baptized affects the way I behave at work."
- 98% of respondents agree, or strongly agree that "My Lutheran beliefs inspire me to think differently about my relationships."

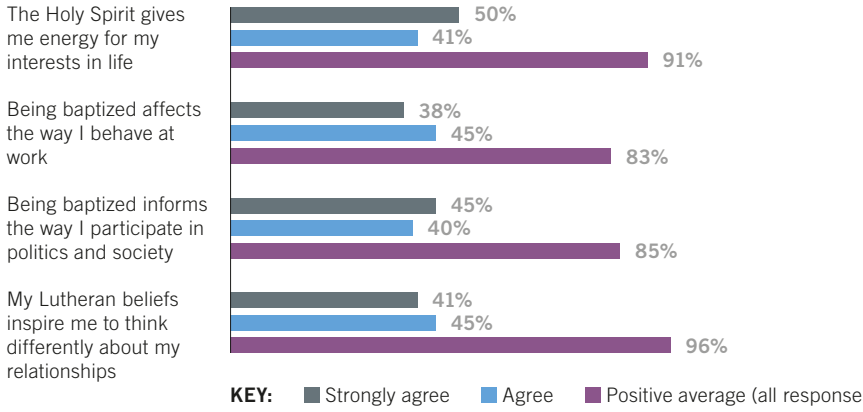
Our baptism also calls us to participate in God's work in the world through our relationship with all of creation. Our vocation to care for creation is rooted in the fundamental belief "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good." (Gen 1:31)

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus commissions his followers to proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The gospel is a gift and a promise for all creation, just as it is for humans. John reminds us that the Spirit blows where it will, often in mysterious and surprising ways. The Bible also affirms that the Spirit is the breath of God, the wisdom by which creation was made, that continues to create and sustain the Earth and all creatures. The Spirit of the Triune God is the one in which the cosmos lives and moves and has its being. (Acts 17:28)

Rooted in our sacramental theology about the ubiquity of the Spirit, the real presence of Christ, and the capacity for ordinary finite creatures to contain the infinite (*finitum capax infinitii*), Martin Luther affirmed God's Spirit is constantly at work behind the masks of creation.

In his writing on the Sacrament of Holy Communion, he affirms the presence of God in every river and rock. However, if we blindly look for God's Spirit through our own reason, we could trip on the rock or drown in the river! So that we do not have to grope in the dark in such a way that creates anxiety and ambiguity about God's presence, the Word and sacraments unmask God's presence in all creation as gracious.

Being Lutheran in the world



The charts above present response to questions asked in the survey.

In the same way that the sacramental exchange sends us out into the world to serve our human neighbor, the revelation of God's gracious presence compels us to serve all creatures with the same good news of God's mission to reconcile all creation.

Survey respondents strongly affirmed the statements "Lutherans should care for creation", "Lutherans should care about gender justice" and "I'm called to make justice". These statements received the highest affirmation across all regions of the communion, as seen in the chart below.

Cultural traditions

While every sector of daily life is a venue for expressing our baptismal vocation, the study process raised questions about the relationship between practices of the shared Lutheran tradition and local church traditions.

Previously we noted that in the context of liturgy, the Augsburg Confession affirms that rituals can be altered and adapted so long as they do not obscure the gospel or burden people's consciences. However, outside the context of worship, the question of diverse cultural traditions practices becomes complicated. Here, we enter into the realm of ethics.

When engaging in intercultural dialogue and dialectic, we need to be aware of the risks of syncretism and cultural appropriation. *Syncretism* is the uncritical merging of different traditions. The fear of syncretism led to several ecumenical conflicts in Lutheran history.

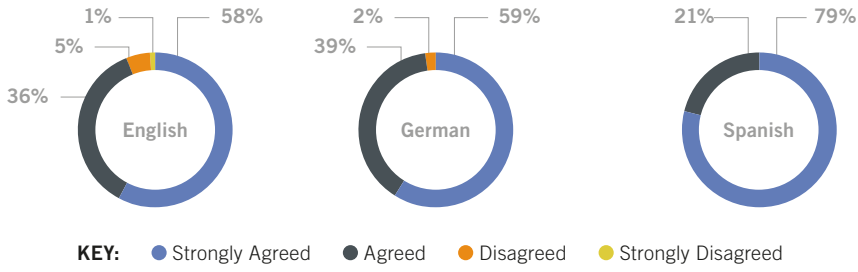
There are two real risks to uncritically blending beliefs or practices of other religions, cultures, or philosophy. The first risk is that we adopt beliefs or practices that are contrary to the gospel. For example, we may live in a society where there is segregation or casteism. But excluding people in worship by class or race is contrary to the gospel and therefore not an acceptable cultural practice for a Lutheran congregation. Some Lutherans live in a society that practices purification rites that profess to make us holy or clean, demand financial gifts in return for healing, or promote dietary restrictions that merit salvation. Such practices are conditional, and therefore contrary to the gospel of God's love as gift and promise.

By engaging in theological reflection and discernment, Lutherans can help one another resist these exploitative practices, especially when they are promoted by influential social, political or church leaders. Luther wrote, "Whatever does not teach Christ is not yet apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching."[29]

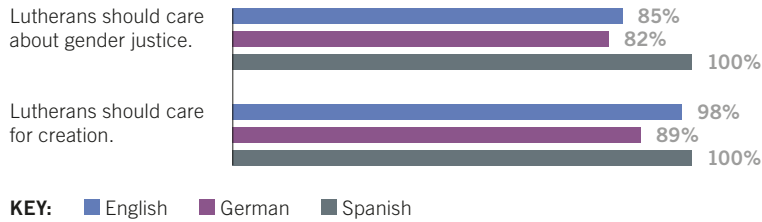
The second risk is appropriating cultural practices outside of their context or meaning, even if they promote Christ in a broad sense. For example, rituals of blessing may be linked to a particular land or ancestry. Such rituals are deeply meaningful and may be practiced by Lutherans who belong to that tradition or are invited to participate in those traditions. However, it would be inappropriate for Lutherans to adopt the practices of another culture without their consent and guidance.

As long as we do not obscure the gospel, or engage in cultural appropriation, Article VII of the Augsburg Confession is clear that material culture or traditions that do not contradict the doctrine of the gospel of justification by grace through faith (*doctrina evangelii*) are indifferent (*adiaphora*), and therefore could be a helpful tool to contextualize and communicate the gospel.

I am called to participate in different ways of making justice



Lutherans are called to justice



The diagrams above present response to questions asked in the survey.

Consequently, *local traditions and material culture according to the Lutheran confessions can be adopted into Christian worship and life as practices that communicate Christ (was Christum treibet).*[30]

Many survey respondents across all language groups expressed a degree of anxiety about the relationship between religious practice and cultural practices. But many expressed an approach that resonates with the aim of Article VII. For example, one respondent from the survey expressed "I affirm the church's call to recognize and bless cultural traditions but believe that scripture is the final norm for all of us. Thus, Christians will necessarily sometimes bless, sometimes modify, and sometimes reject our cultural practices."

Luther offers many examples of contextualizing the gospel in his own German culture and incorporating other traditions. For example, Luther suggests that all Christians would do well to adopt St. Cyprian's African practice of kissing the hands of an infant before it is baptized as a way to honor God's work in creating the child and the hands that would engage in baptismal work.[31] In the course of this study process, participants named many local traditions and cultural practices that communicated the good news of God's love in Christ.

PROJECT STORIES

The majority of members in the Lutheran Church of Senegal are from the Serere people group. The Serere are a minority ethnic group. Christians only make up five percent of the population that is over 90 percent Muslim. Yet the Senegalese people maintain bonds of peace through their stories and practices of inter-ethnic belonging. All people groups share the practice of celebrating the moment a baby is old enough to be carried on the mother's back. In French, this is called *califourchon*, which means "astride" or "astraddle." Reflecting traditional cultural rituals of marking *califourchon*, the church will hold a rite to bless the baby and mother. At its heart, it is an act of thanksgiving for infant and maternal health. In Luther's words, this practice is not yet apostolic, but it certainly communicates the love of God in a deeply embodied and culturally meaningful way.

Among the keywords that were named in response to open questions about local traditions, some of the most frequent were communion, liturgy, baptism, Christmas, music, singing, eucharist, Advent, and Easter. But still others represented contextualized traditions through delightful words such as Wednesday, vigil, feeding, St. Lucia, potlucks, childcare, choir, homeless neighbors, coffee, camp, youth, Chrismons, pancakes, gardening, Latvian, trees, and Duwamish dancing.

PROJECT STORIES

During the study process, the Youth League of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa launched a project to explore dialogue between theological and cultural identity. The ELCSA Youth League hosted a series of webinars and focus groups in over forty parishes on the question of what it means to be young, African, and Lutheran. The youth were responding out of a hunger to explore questions of liturgy, church practices, and culture, which they felt did not represent their identity as Africans. The youth engaged their Lutheran identity in critical dialectic with contextual identities to find authentic expressions of what it means to be Lutheran in their culture. In the area of liturgy, they discussed ways the worship could be translated to speak out of, and into, the African life experience. In the area of theology and society, they recommended that the church focus on teaching shared Lutheran doctrines through Bible studies that addressed social problems affecting all people, namely gender-based violence and exclusion of sexual minorities and youth.

Belonging in majority or minority contexts

With respect to the *tentatio* of intercultural dialogue and dialectic, the study process revealed a qualitative difference between Lutherans who lived in majority contexts and those who live as a religious minority. When asked whether Lutheran identity is personally significant, only 61 percent of the German language respondents agreed, perhaps reflecting a growing secular, ecumenical, or majority context. But 79 percent of the Spanish, French, and English respondents stated the Lutheran identity is significant in their context. Among contexts where Lutherans are in the majority, there was a greater call to focus on our ecumenical identity, rather than what makes Lutherans distinctive.

For example, many Lutherans in the Nordic and German context have been historically among the religious majority in society, and closely aligned with the dominant culture and legal systems. Many state churches were influenced by the Reformed tradition as much or more than the Lutheran tradition. Due to these historic and ecumenical realities, many responses from western Europe and the Nordic region were less enthusiastic about a distinct Lutheran identity. Many preferred to highlight the ecumenical nature of the Lutheran tradition. However, the need to speak of a normative identity was highly significant among Lutherans who are a religious or cultural minority in their context. Even among Lutheran churches that developed as a result of the missionary activity of other Christian traditions (Reformed, Baptist, Pentecostal, etc.) and therefore still bear the marks and influence of those traditions, articulating a specifically Lutheran identity was consistently more important to Lutherans who live as a religious minority. What became apparent during this process was that a significant percentage of Lutherans across our communion express their worship, spirituality, service, and public witness in contexts where Lutherans are a religious minority. Despite differences in cultural context, there was broad consensus that our baptism calls us into loving solidarity with the world. Our identities are formed in ecumenical, interfaith, and interdisciplinary contexts of diverse cultures, languages, worldviews, political realities, and occupations, through which we express our common vocation.

Questions for Reflection:

1. *How is your worship shaped by your local context? How can you express your gifts in worship?*
2. *In what variety of ways do your acts of service express the hope that is within you?*
3. *What issues that matter to you and your neighbors inspire your prophetic voice?*
4. *What relationships (family, church, society, ecology, occupational) relate most to your baptismal vocation?*
5. *How do you feel called to express your faith? What traditions bring you joy?*

04: Revisiting spirituality and spiritual gifts

We have explored the different layers and dimensions of Lutheran identity or identities, against the background of (re)discovering our Lutheran spirituality. At this point, we can make several key affirmations about our shared Lutheran identity and our diverse identities.

- The spirituality of faith formation in the Lutheran tradition is Trinitarian. God continues to create, redeem, reconcile, and sanctify all creation. The Holy Spirit continues God's Mission in the world. God has revealed this mystery as good news in Jesus Christ and entrusted this mission and ministry to the church.
- As part of the ecumenical church, the Lutheran tradition proclaims this good news of Christ as gift and promise and communicates it most purely in terms of the doctrine of justification: We are justified by grace (*charis*) through faith. Faith is the gift of Christ at work in us, through the Spirit. This is the connection between the work of Jesus (*Christology*) and the Spirit (*pneumatology*).
- Baptism is the sacrament by which we receive this gift (*charis*) of the Spirit and belong to the church. In this sacrament, God identifies us as beloved, which is the source of our shared Lutheran identity.
- The church nurtures this gift every time the congregation (the communion of saints) gathers in worship to proclaim this good news in the reading and preaching of the Word, and in sharing the sacrament of Holy Communion. Lutherans affirm the real presence of Christ, by the Spirit in word and sacraments. By these means of grace, we receive Christ's holiness. This is the connection between *justification and sanctification.*
- From worship, we are sent out to actively bear Christ's holiness to the world in every sector of our lives. We proclaim the good news through loving service to all humans and all creation, and advocate for the dignity and safeguarding of all life. This is the link between *justification and justice.*

- Our experience of worship and service is expressed in the context of our individual bodies, interests, and inclinations, and through our received linguistic, social, and material cultures. The diversity of bodies and cultures results in a diversity of faithful identities that are reconciled into one body of Christ.
- The one gift of the Spirit that unites us all in baptism (charis), produces a diversity of spiritual gifts (charismata), which accounts for the diverse expressions of our shared ecumenical and Lutheran tradition. In this sense, all members of the church are charismatic, if charismata are properly understood in light of the concept of baptismal vocation.

Questions for Reflection:

1. *What are your spiritual gifts?*
2. *Describe the ways you experience the link between justification and sanctification?*
3. *Describe the ways you see a link between justification and justice?*

05: "For the common good": Discerning the tradition in a communion of belonging

In 1 Corinthians 12:7, Paul is clear, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." But as he continues to write that in our diversity, we belong to one body.

Being a confessing church means that we engage in processes that discern how those gifts are used for the common good. It also means that we help one another guard against theologies that mislead or abuse gifts.

The study process revealed a need to discern spirits and the spirits of the age that form and inform contemporary discourse. These "spirits" include the social, political, economic, scientific, theological, and philosophical trends of any given age. Many spiritual narratives claim special revelations as a way to glorify a new clerical, shamanistic, or spiritual class of Christians. Many of our churches minister in contexts where Christians use such claims to exploit power and commodify spirituality and spiritual gifts for personal gain.

For these reasons its outcomeThe study process calls for the development of theological frames and mechanisms of discernment (*tentatio*) in order to equip people to differentiate between diverse gifts that are used to build up the body in love and compassion, and those that are being used to exploit, extract, and abuse individuals within the church and society. The letter to the Thessalonians urged us "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast to what is good. Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess 5:19-22). Paul's first letter to the Corinthians chapter 12 offers a framework for this kind of spiritual discernment. Paul writes that all gifts are given in love in order to build up the body.

Only 27 percent of English language respondents agreed with the statement: "My church helps me discern between gifts of the Holy Spirit, and someone who is trying to gain personal advantage," while 58 percent of German respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. While Lutherans have a robust theology of the Spirit and a rich sacramental spirituality, our members look to the communion for help in discerning narratives about spiritual gifts in the diverse contexts of lived Lutheran identities.

To this end, our communion is a gift and a task.[32]

Final remarks

This study process highlighted the importance of ecumenical, interfaith, intercultural, and interdisciplinary dialogue as a means for LWF member churches with diverse identities to *recognize each other as belonging to a shared Lutheran tradition.*

In the end, there is no single reply to the question of Lutheran identity. One participant shared, "I like that we, as Lutherans, can live in mystery. We don't have to have all the answers, but we will always seek understanding." As a way to discern understanding in our communion, we return to the concept of liberty. Martin Luther's concept of Christian liberty reminds us that while the good news makes us perfectly free, we are bound in love to serve all creatures.

In much the same way, after chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians affirms the variety of gifts, services, activities and belonging, chapter 13 records Paul's discernment, that the greatest gift is love.

As a communion, LWF member churches are autonomous, and free to express our Lutheran identity in contextually relevant and meaningful ways. And at the same time, we are accountable to one another, to ensure that we do not harm the consciences of one another in the process. *Liberty and love are good Lutheran guides for our task of faithful tentatio.*

Another way to interpret this gift and task is through the notion of conscience and community. When called to defend his writings at the Diet of Worms, Martin Luther became famous for his legendary appeal to personal conscience. But just as the personal gift of faith is never private and always has public implications, every individual conscience is formed by increasing circles of community with family, neighbor, society, nation, humanity, and all creation.

As we negotiate our shared Lutheran identity and expressions of our diverse Lutheran identities, we must ground our personal experiences in ever increasing circles of belonging. From the centrality of worship, into the margins of our various vocations and back, we engage in a life of *oratio, meditatio*, and *tentatio* – reading the word and reading the world. One respondent commented, "I appreciate the liturgy and the connection it provides to Christians in other times and places."

One circle of belonging extends to the ecumenical family of Christian churches. To be Lutheran is to be ecumenical. We have seen that the Augsburg Confession was written as an ecumenical confession of the Christian faith. The work of ecumenism does not create unity but gives visible expression to the spiritual unity that already exists among the baptized in the one body of Christ. *Ecumenical* **dialogues** *provide us with a broader context to ensure our faithful discernment remains rooted in our ecumenical Christian confession.* They also guard against confessionalism, and help us remain open to spiritual, pastoral, and receptive avenues for unity.

Lutherans frequently engage in spiritual ecumenism through joint worship in local parishes. Lutherans experience pastoral ecumenism when we extend and receive hospitality to worship, pray, and serve with family and friends who belong to different churches and Christian traditions.

Two respondents provide opposite perspectives on the pastoral ecumenism that occurs between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. One responded in English, "I have been Lutheran all my life [since] my father, a full-on Irish Roman Catholic agreed to raise his children in my mother's faith. So, I knew [ecumenism] was important, and good, and considered it a gift. I still feel this." And another in German shared, "I'm not Lutheran … I'm baptized Catholic … but belonging to a [Lutheran] congregation. So, you can say I'm very ecumenical. And I identify a lot with Luther's writings."

Often these spiritual and pastoral relationships lead to receptive ecumenism, which means that we reform our practices, theological claims or structures because of what we have learned or received from other traditions. Full communion agreements, and documents that express ecumenical consensus demonstrate the ways in which religious literacy helps Lutherans broaden our Christian identity and strengthen our Lutheran identity. Through *tentatio* we learn more about our own identity. Our Lutheran identity frees us to engage in faithful discernment, trusting that as we discern the Spirit's work, we will deepen our own sense of liberty and belonging in Christ and to the world that God loves.

Reflecting on this paradox of freedom and belonging, former LWF President Dr Gottfried Brakemeier wrote:

For all these reasons I want to encourage you to (re-)discover the charm of the Lutheran confession. Its charm is not limited to some dogmas and axioms of faith. It concerns a way of being. They reside in biblical hermeneutics that can distinguish between letter and spirit; an anthropological realism that refuses to deify or demonize the human being; a compromised freedom that distances itself from both legalism and permissiveness; in a participatory ecclesial structure that excludes human hierarchy of any kind.

The Lutheran confession invites me to faith without prohibiting critical reasoning. It asks for "thinking believers," people who know how to judge things (*tentatio*), and yet don't remain stuck in criticism. Lutheranism has taught me a certain view of reality that is a little more complicated than many oversimplifications are able to make us believe. To subdivide the world into bandits and good guys, winners and losers, gullible and unbelieving, righteous and sinful. Well, this is the theory of hypocrites or naive ones. It is stupid to oppose the wisdom of the gospel.[33]

Perhaps this "charm of the Lutheran confession" is the beauty of Lutheran identity. We are grounded in the unchanging gift and promise of the God who creates, redeems, and sanctifies, and at the same time we are transformed and freed by love. Or, as one respondent affirmed:

"One of the biggest blessings about being a Lutheran is having the space to dwell within questions. And, we have the freedom and space to wonder and journey through the many questions about what our faith in Jesus means for ourselves and our communities. I am blessed to be both rooted in life-nourishing tradition, and to have the wings to explore the ways the Holy Spirit continues to move in the church and the world."

Appendix

List of references

https://www.lutheranworld.org/resources/publication-self-understanding-lutheran-communion-study-document

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Endnotes

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3 "A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels," 1522.

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6 For further engagement on the topic of biblical hermeneutics and the role of the Bible in the LWF communion, see https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2016/dtpw-hermeneutics_statement_en.pdf

7 See Chapter II "A shared tradition: confessions, doctrines, and theologies"

8 Pelikan first said this in the course of his 1983 Jefferson Lecture, "The Vindication of Tradition."

9 *We Believe in the Holy Spirit: Global Perspectives on Lutheran Identities*, Cheryl Peterson and Chad Rimmer, editors. LWF/ Evangelische Verlangsanstalt, Leipzig, 2021.

10 WA, 50:659; LW, 34:285.

11 54% (daily), 34% (weekly), 4% (monthly), 6% (few times per year), 2% (never) (answers: 2,029)

12 WA, 30 (I):250; Book of Concord, Small Catechism, 355 (6).

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23 *Christian Worship: Unity in Cultural Diversity*, S. Anita Stauffer, editor, LWF Studies, 1996. https://www.lutheranworld.org/resources/publication-christian-worship-unity-cultural-diversity-lwf-studies

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31 WA 10 (II):297; LW, 45:41.

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