

Comparison of the ELCA and the LCMS:

The following is meant to be a primer to some of the differences that exist between the ELCA and the LCMS in regards to what we believe, teach, and confess. It is not an exhaustive list, but touches upon some major differences.

On the Bible:

ELCA— “We also find in the Bible human emotion, testimony, opinion, cultural limitation and bias.”

“Because Biblical writers, editors and compilers were limited by their times and world views, even as we are, the Bible contains material wedded to those times and places. It also means that writers sometimes provide differing and even contradictory views of God’s word, ways and will.”

“we sometimes conclude either that the writer’s culture or personal experience (e.g., subordination of women or keeping of slaves) seems to have prompted his missing what God was saying or doing, or that God now is saying or doing something new.”

Cited from: <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/New-or-Returning-to-Church/Dig-Deeper/The-Bible.aspx>

LCMS— “It is the inspired and inerrant Word of God”

Cited from <http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=563>

Trinity

ELCA – *The ELCA affirms belief in the Triune God, but allows for some strange views of it.* From their website:

“ELCA Lutherans believe that God reveals who God really is to us. Therefore the Christian church must confess its faith in the essential Trinity. God is one God, revealed in three persons.”

Cited from: <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/New-or-Returning-to-Church/Dig-Deeper/The-Holy-Trinity.aspx>

“Do I have to believe in the Trinity to be Christian?

Question: Should I renounce my membership? I'm a committed follower of God, Christ and the Spirit, but I don't believe the Trinity theory. I've been told, "If you don't believe in the Trinity doctrine you can't be a Christian."

How does one prove this doctrine?

Answer: You need not renounce your membership in the Christian church. Even Paul didn't ascribe to the doctrine of the Trinity since it wasn't defined until hundreds of years later. But I believe he would confess the truth of the revelation of God to which this doctrine bears witness.

The Trinity isn't meant to explain God. In fact, saying God is One but three persons proves that God can't be explained -- only witnessed to.

The Trinity isn't some litmus test of intellectual assent to a doctrine. Rather, it calls us to trust and commit to the God revealed as Father, Son and Spirit, which is precisely how you spoke of your faith. We can't prove the Trinity, but based on Scripture, church tradition and experience, the doctrine of the Trinity expresses the faith that we hold to be true and life-giving. We don't need to prove God. We only need to worship and obey God. This we can do!”

Cited from: <http://www2.elca.org/questions/Results.asp?recid=58>

Another problem in the ELCA is the allowing for radical feminism to rob the church of the revealed names of God. Instead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, other formulas are being developed and used instead: “Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier”, “Parent, Child, Spirit” or “Holy eternal Majesty, holy incarnate Word, holy abiding Spirit”. For greater examples of this, go to:

<http://www.herchurch.org/> which is the website of a congregation that belongs to the ELCA.

LCMS – *The LCMS believes in the Triune God.*

“On the basis of the Holy Scriptures we teach the sublime article of the Holy Trinity; that is, we teach that the one true God, Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:4, is the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, three distinct persons, but of one and the same divine essence, equal in power, equal in eternity, equal in majesty, because each person possesses the one divine essence entire, Col. 2:9, Matt. 28:19. We hold that all teachers and communions that deny the doctrine of the Holy Trinity are outside the pale of the Christian Church. The Triune God is the God who is gracious to man, John 3:16-18, 1 Cor. 12:3. Since the Fall, no man can believe in the "fatherhood" of God except he believe in the eternal Son of God, who became man and reconciled us to God by His vicarious satisfaction, 1 John 2:23; John 14:6. Hence we warn against Unitarianism, which in our country has to a great extent impenetrated the sects and is being spread particularly also through the influence of the lodges.”

Cited from: <http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=564>

“The Synod believes and teaches that "the three persons of the Trinity are co-equal and co-eternal, one God" because this is what we find taught in the Holy Scriptures, God's inspired and errorless Word. Both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, together with God the Father, are named in Scripture with divine names ("God," "Lord"), are described as having divine attributes (eternal existence, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, etc.), are depicted as carrying out divine works (creating, forgiving, judging, preserving) and are accorded glory, honor and worship which are worthy of God alone.”

Cited from: <http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=2682>

Holy Spirit:

ELCA – *The ELCA while affirming the Triune God speaks of the Holy Spirit as a face of God.* From their website: “For ELCA Lutherans, the Holy Spirit -- as person -- might be said to be one of God’s "three faces.””

Cited from: <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/New-or-Returning-to-Church/Dig-Deeper/The-Holy-Spirit.aspx>

This way of speaking about the person of the Holy Spirit is actually heretical. It is a mark of the ancient heresy of Modalism. This speaks not of three persons, but three faces of the same, or three modes of the same being. One of the chief promoters of this heresy was a man named Sabellius. From the Christian Encyclopedia: “Sabellius.* Modalistic Monarchianism as developed under him is known as Sabellianism: God, the absolute monad, reveals Himself successively in 3 prosopa (*Gk.* “faces”), each representing the entire monad (Father: Creator and Lawgiver; Son: Redeemer; Holy Spirit: Lifegiver).”

Cited from: <http://www.lcms.org/ca/www/cyclopedia/02/display.asp?t1=m&word=MONARCHIANISM>

LCMS – *The LCMS teaches the biblical doctrine that the Holy Spirit is a unique person of the Triune God.* From their website: “The Holy Spirit is the third person in the Holy Trinity, true God with the Father and the Son--therefore not a "power" or an "energy" of God. We read of God the Holy Spirit in Matthew 28:19 where Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The only true God is the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three distinct persons in one divine being (the Holy Trinity). The Father has begotten the Son from eternity; the Son is begotten of the Father from eternity; the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. To the Father especially is ascribed the work of creation; to the Son, the work of redemption; to the Holy Spirit, the work of sanctification. How do we know the Holy Spirit is one of the persons of the Trinity and, therefore, truly God? Because the Bible clearly calls Him God. Acts 5:3-4 equates the Holy Spirit with God. Jesus promised, "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about Me" (John 15:26).”

Cited from: <http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=2677>

Creation:

ELCA – *The ELCA allows for the view that God used evolution to create things. This means that the account in Genesis 1 and 2 do not have to be true for the member of the ELCA. The ELCA teaches the historical critical method of interpretation of Scripture, which discounts the accounts as history and treats them more as poetry.*

From their website: “The ELCA does not have an official position on creation vs. evolution, but we subscribe to the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation, so we believe God created the universe and all that is therein, only not necessarily in six 24-hour days, and that God actually may have used evolution in the process of creation. In fact, to deny the possibility that evolutionary processes were used is seen by some as an attempt to limit God's power.

“Historical criticism” is an understanding that the Bible must be understood in the cultural context of the times in which it was written.”

Cited from: <http://www2.elca.org/questions/Results.asp?recid=4>

LCMS – *The LCMS believes that God created all things out of nothing in exactly the way that the Scriptures teach. From their website: “We teach that God has created heaven and earth, and that in the manner and in the space of time recorded in the Holy Scriptures, especially Gen. 1 and 2, namely, by His almighty creative word, and in six days. We reject every doctrine which denies or limits the work of creation as taught in Scripture. In our days it is denied or limited by those who assert, ostensibly in deference to science, that the world came into existence through a process of evolution; that is, that it has, in immense periods of time, developed more or less of itself. Since no man was present when it pleased God to create the world, we must look for a reliable account of creation to God's own record, found in God's own book, the Bible. We accept God's own record with full confidence and confess with Luther's Catechism: “I believe that God has made me and all creatures.””*

Cited from: <http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=565>

Salvation:

ELCA – *The ELCA teaches that non-Christians can go to heaven. From their website: ““The Christian hope for salvation, whether for the believing few or the unbelieving many, is grounded in the person and meaning of Christ alone, not in the potential of the world's religions to save, nor in the moral seriousness of humanists and people of good will, not even in the good works of pious Christians and church people.... There is a universalist thrust in the New Testament, particularly in Paul's theology. How else can we read passages such as 'for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ’”*

Again: “If Jesus is the Lord and Savior, he is the universal Lord and Savior, not merely my personal Lord and Savior. Because Jesus is the unique and universal Savior, there is a large hope for salvation, not only for me and others with the proper credentials of believing and belonging to the church, but for all people whenever or wherever they might have lived and no matter how religious or irreligious they may have proved to be themselves.”

Cited from: <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/New-or-Returning-to-Church/Dig-Deeper/Salvation.aspx>

LCMS – *The LCMS believes that faith alone saves. Jesus is the only way to salvation, He is the only door. From their website: “Since God has reconciled the whole world unto Himself through the vicarious life and death of His Son and has commanded that the reconciliation effected by Christ be proclaimed to men in the Gospel, to the end that they may believe it, 2 Cor. 5:18, 19; Rom. 1:5, therefore faith in Christ is the only way for men to obtain personal reconciliation with God, that is, forgiveness of sins, as both the Old and the New Testament Scriptures testify, Acts 10:43; John 3:16-18, 36. By this faith in Christ, through which men obtain the forgiveness of sins, is not meant any human effort to fulfill the Law of God after the example of Christ, but faith in the Gospel, that is, in the forgiveness of sins, or justification, which was fully earned for us by Christ and is offered by the Gospel. This faith justifies, not inasmuch as it is a work of man, but inasmuch as it lays hold of the grace offered, the forgiveness of sins, Rom. 4:16”*

Cited from: <http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=568>

Justification

The article of doctrine known by the name "Justification" was called by Luther the chief article of the Christian Faith. It is the Article by which the Church stands or falls. That means that when the article on Justification is given up, then the Church will soon fall into all sorts of heresies. The Augsburg Confession of 1530, confesses:

Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works. People are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight (Romans 3 and 4 [3:21–26; 4:5]). (from *Concordia : The Lutheran Confessions*, Edited by Paul Timothy McCain (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 33.)

In 1999 the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Roman Catholic Church signed the 1997 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ). The ELCA approved the JDDJ in 1997 by 97%, and is a major part of the LWF. The LCMS is not a member of the LWF.

In JDDJ, the Lutheran theologians say that agreement on the basic points of Justification has been achieved, and yet Lutheran theologians from around the world have criticized the document for giving up the Lutheran definitions for the Roman Catholic ones.

JDDJ showed the problem with the ecumenical ideology of the ELCA that has led to so many "Full Communion" agreements with church bodies that do not agree even on the Lord's Supper. Statements like JDDJ craft specific words and phrases which make agreement possible without yielding any previous statements (The Augsburg Confession, or the Decrees and Canons of the Council of Trent for example). Everything is done in the name of "diversity", as it we all agree, but just express it differently. JDDJ declares that differences still exist in language, theological elaboration, and emphasis, and yet claims that some sort of agreement has been made. The Roman Catholic Church still believes the same things that brought on the Reformation, and some even harsher as the Council of Trent condemned Lutheran beliefs. Lutherans should hold to their reformation beliefs too, but JDDJ showed a willingness by theologians of the ELCA for the sake of getting along to give up that article by which the Church stands or falls.

For an excellent evaluation of JDDJ which includes the text of JDDJ go to:

<http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/justclp.pdf>

For another great resource on the LCMS response to JDDJ go to:

<http://www.lifeoftheworld.com/believe/statements/statementdoc.pdf>

The Resurrection of Jesus:

ELCA – *The resurrection for the ELCA does not necessarily have to be a historic event, but something of faith.* From their website: "All of this has led some scholars to write that the risen Jesus (and apparitions of the risen Jesus) is a supernatural reality which does not belong to this world and cannot be the object of historic investigation. Rather, Jesus' resurrection is an object of faith.

Accordingly, ELCA members believe that what history does is to demonstrate the disciples' faith in the resurrection. Their witness and testimony to Jesus' post-death appearances make it abundantly clear that the resurrection was a primary object of the apostolic proclamation from Christianity's very beginning."

This view then means that it is not important whether Jesus is still dead in a tomb or not, just that you believe that He rose.

Cited from: <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/New-or-Returning-to-Church/Dig-Deeper/The-Resurrection.aspx>

LCMS – *The LCMS affirms a real, historic, personal, and bodily resurrection of Jesus. It is as the Bible says.*

The Virgin Birth of Jesus:

ELCA – *The ELCA, while affirming the historic and biblical doctrine of the Virgin Birth, also allows for someone to not believe in it.* From their website: “This statement, written in the 16th Century, supports the Western Church’s traditional understanding of the doctrine referred to as The Virgin Birth. While it remains official and normative for the Evangelical Lutheran Church today, it has not closed the doctrinal debate over Jesus’ conception for many Lutherans, and by inference that includes ELCA members. It is a doctrine debated by many other Protestant Christians, scholars and those who inquire about the Christian faith and its tenets.”

Cited from: <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/New-or-Returning-to-Church/Dig-Deeper/Virgin-Birth.aspx>

LCMS – *The LCMS believes in the Virgin Birth.* From their website: “The LCMS believes, together with historic and orthodox Christendom of all ages, that Jesus was true God, begotten of his Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary. Mary was truly Jesus' mother and he was truly her son, while at the same time God was truly Jesus' Father, and he was truly God's Son. The suggestion that Mary merely "carried Jesus in her womb and gave birth to Him but He was not her biological son," therefore, is in direct conflict with what the Bible clearly teaches. Attempts to "explain" how the virgin birth and the incarnation of the Son of God is were/are possible from a purely "biological" point of view are, of course, misguided, since we are dealing here with a miracle and mystery that transcends human reason or scientific investigation.”

Cited from: <http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=2676>

The Devil:

ELCA – *The ELCA allows for belief in a real Devil or a more generic “evil”.* From their website: “We must begin by saying that there are ELCA Lutherans who understand Satan (or the Devil) to be a very real being, author of evil, prompter of sin, destroyer of humankind. Other ELCA Lutherans view Satan metaphorically — as the personification of evil forces in this world that oppose and obstruct God’s will in every age, be they human or spiritual.”

Cited from: <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/New-or-Returning-to-Church/Dig-Deeper/Satan.aspx>

LCMS – *The LCMS teaches as the Scriptures do, that the Devil is a personal being, a fallen angel.*

See: <http://www.lcms.org/ca/www/cyclopedia/02/display.asp?t1=D&word=DEVIL>

Church Fellowship:

ELCA – *The ELCA has entered into “full communion” with many church bodies of varying confessions of Faith. These church bodies do not even agree on whether the Body and Blood of Jesus are present in the Lord’s Supper. There are other differences in belief as well. From this, it is clear that the ELCA does not believe that full agreement in doctrine is necessary for full communion. The church bodies which the ELCA are in full communion with are: Moravian Church (1999), The Episcopal Church (1999), Reformed Church in America (1997), United Church of Christ (1997), Presbyterian Church USA (1997), and the United Methodist Church (2009). None of these church bodies believe in the real presence of Christ during the Lord’s Supper.*

LCMS – *The LCMS is active in discussions with many groups and has established “pulpit and altar fellowship” with many church bodies throughout the world. The LCMS believes that communing together, sharing pulpits and clergy, and holding joint worship services are the highest form of expressing unity. That is why any attempt to join with other church bodies involves a serious, honest, and thorough review of the doctrines that are confessed by each church body. This is in keeping with the Lutheran tradition set by Martin Luther in 1529 at a place called Marburg (for more information look up the Marburg Colloquy).*

On Abortion:

ELCA – *The ELCA is Pro-Choice. Their social statement made in 1991 allowed for all views. Pro-Life people are allowed in their fellowship, but even their health insurance plans for church workers covers abortion procedures. The only exclusion in the health plan is for an abortion after 20 weeks. All others would be covered.* See page 16 of the following from the ELCA health plan: https://www.elcabop.org/Home/UnderstandMyBenefits/Health/ELCAPrimary/HospMed/~media/documents/100_05.ashx

LCMS – *The LCMS is Pro-Life. This again is the stance of Scripture. All life is precious in God's eyes. The LCMS believes that abortion is contrary to God's Word and "is not a moral option except, except as a tragically unavoidable byproduct of medical procedures necessary to prevent the death of another human being, viz., the mother" (1979 Res. 3-02A).*

Cited from <http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=2120>

On Homosexuality:

ELCA—“The 1991 Churchwide Assembly (CWA) — the highest legislative body of the ELCA — affirmed "... that gay and lesbian people, as individuals created by God, are welcome to participate fully in the life of the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America." This policy was reaffirmed by the 1995 CWA, and the 1999 CWA further encouraged discerning conversation about homosexuality and the inclusion of gay and lesbian persons in our common life and mission.”

Cited from:

<http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/New-or-Returning-to-Church/Dig-Deeper/Homosexuality-and-the-ELCA.aspx>

ELCA – The 2009 Churchwide Assembly voted to support same-gender relationships, and allowed for practicing homosexuals to be pastors.

LCMS—“The Missouri Synod believes that the Bible teaches that homosexual behavior is contrary to God's Word and will, and seeks to minister to those who are struggling with homosexual inclinations.”

“The Word of God clearly condemns homophile behavior in Lev. 18:22, Rom. 1:26-27, and 1 Cor. 6:9”

Cited from:

<http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=2724>

Women's Ordination:

ELCA – *The ELCA has ordained women since its founding.*

LCMS – *The LCMS does not ordain women in keeping with the Scriptures.* “The LCMS believes that those Scripture passages which say that women should not "teach" or "have authority" in the church (see, for example, 1 Cor. 11 and 14; 1 Timothy 2) mean that women ought not hold the authoritative teaching office in the church--that is, the office of pastor.”

Cited from: <http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=2702>

Homosexual Ordination:

ELCA – *The ELCA as of August 2009 allows for homosexual ordination.*

LCMS – *The LCMS believes that homosexuality is intrinsically sinful. Practicing homosexuals are not allowed to be pastors.*

