

What are some particular teachings of Lutheran churches?

The Lutheran tradition of Christianity arose out of a challenge to Catholic Church teaching in the 15th – 16th centuries. Lutherans are Christians who are influenced greatly by the teachings of Martin Luther (1483 – 1546). Luther was a German theologian who realized that there were significant differences between what he read in the Bible and the practices of the Roman Catholic Church at that time. On October 31, 1517, he posted a challenge on the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg University, titled “95 Theses” (*to debate 95 theological issues*). His hope was that the church would reform its practice and preaching to be more consistent with the Word of God as contained in the Bible.

What started as an academic debate soon escalated into a distinct separation between the Roman Catholic Church of the time and those who accepted Luther’s suggested reforms. “Lutheran” became the name of the group that agreed with Luther’s convictions, though his intention was never to break away from Catholicism, only reform some of its teachings and practices.

Today Lutherans still hold to the basic principles of Luther’s theological teachings. These comprise the very essence of Lutheranism:

- We are saved by the **grace of God alone** -- not by anything we do;
- Our salvation is through **faith alone** -- a confident trust in God;
- Who in **Christ alone** promises us forgiveness, life and salvation; and
- The **Bible alone** is the norm for faith and life -- the true standard by which teachings and doctrines are to be judged.

Lutherans are part of a reforming movement within the whole Christian church; as a part of practicing their faith, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its predecessors have engaged in ecumenical dialogue with other church bodies for decades. The ELCA has an ongoing dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church over many of our historic differences.