

What do Lutherans believe with regard to...

What is the Church?

The Christian church is made up of those who have been baptized and thus have received Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the world. Sometimes it is referred to as "the Body of Christ." Lutherans believe that they are a part of a community of faith that began with the gift of the Holy Spirit, God's presence with his people, on the day of Pentecost. The church, regardless of the external form it takes, is the fellowship of those who have been restored to God by Christ. Indeed, to be called into fellowship with Christ is also to be called into community with other believers.

To Lutherans, who subscribe to the one of the Reformation Era's most important documents, the Augsburg Confession, Article VII defines the Church in this way:

"It is also taught among us that one holy Christian Church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among who the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by (people), should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as Paul says in Ephesians 4:4-5, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

The church is essential to Christian life and growth. Its members are all sinners in need of God's grace. It has no claim on human perfection. The church exists solely for the hearing and doing of God's Word. It can justify its existence only when it proclaims the living Word of Christ, administers the Sacraments and gives itself to the world in deeds of service and love. Lutherans have historically recognized a wider fellowship of churches and are eager to work alongside them in ecumenical ministries and projects. This is in response to the teaching of Romans 12:4-5, where we read; *"For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another."*