

What is “Confessing”?

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Lutheran CORE strives to be a voice and network for “confessing Lutherans.” But just what is a *confessing* Lutheran? People sometimes ask that question, and it deserves a good answer.

Lutheran Confessions

Historically, the terms “confessing” or “confessional” harken back to the Lutheran *confessions*, or statements of doctrine, published in the *Book of Concord* in 1580. These documents, which include writings by Martin Luther, his friend and colleague, Phillip Melancthon, and their successors, have served as touchstones of Lutheran orthodoxy across place and time.



Ordination Vows

Most if not every Lutheran pastor has vowed some kind of allegiance to this set of documents at ordination, and Lutheran laity will (hopefully) recognize one of its most beloved portions, Luther’s *Small Catechism*. At the book’s very start stands perhaps its second most famous document, the *Augsburg Confession*. This document was written by Melancthon in 1530 to set forth the doctrine of the churches in Germany (the “evangelicals”) that had embraced Luther’s teachings. For this reason it carries the label of *confession*: it publicly states, or *confesses*, what the evangelical Germans believed.

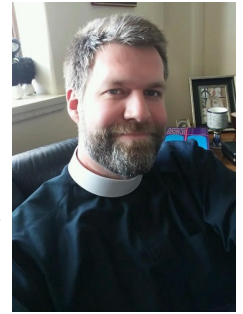
Doctrinal Assaults

This history brings us to a simple definition: *confessing* or *confessional* Lutherans are Lutherans who adhere to the teaching of the *Book of Concord* over against all doubts and doctrinal assaults. They stand in line with those earliest confessors of the Lutheran church and say, “Our churches teach thus and so.” Lutherans do disagree over the status of some of the writings in the *Book of Concord* (notably, the *Formula of Concord*), but all would agree that *confessing* or *confessional* describes a Lutheran’s fidelity to the contents of this book.

Homologeō

Digging a bit deeper, we may look at the term *confess* in light of Scripture. There we find that the term most frequently connected with “confess” is the

Greek term *homologeō*: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). The term used here and in similar passages is a simple combination of two words, *logeō* (to say or speak) and *homo* (same). To *confess* is to “say the same thing.”



A beloved Lutheran theologian named Norman Nagel expressed this aspect of confession in his description of Lutheran worship from 1982:

Our Lord speaks and we listen. His Word bestows what it says. Faith that is born from what is heard acknowledges the gifts received with eager thankfulness and praise . . . Saying back to him what he has said to us, we repeat what is most true and sure. (Lutheran Worship [St. Louis: CPH, 1982] page 6).

Lutheran CORE exists to support Lutherans engaged in this act of confession.

The *Book of Concord* and the churches that cherish it seek to *confess* or *say the same thing* that the Lord has said through His prophets and apostles, trusting that word to be “what is most true and sure.” We could therefore say that confessing Lutherans say the same thing as the Lutheran confessors before them because those confessors said the same thing as God says in His word.

Barmen Declaration

One famous use of the term *confessing* comes from May 1934, when German Protestants, under the leadership of such men as Karl Barth and Martin Niemöller, adopted the *Barmen Declaration*, resisting the racist, Nazi-inspired “German Christian” movement. The Declaration condemned the attempt of National Socialism to change church doctrine and dictate church polity in support of Hitler’s “Aryan” ideology. Indeed, whenever the church resists changes to the doctrines of its Lord, it becomes a *confessing* church, saying what God has said over against all falsehood.

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With churches across America struggling to know and believe what God has spoken, and with attempts

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at changing church doctrine multiplying daily, Lutheran CORE exists to support Lutherans engaged in this act of confession. As the Danish pastor and hymnwriter, Nicholas S. Grundtvig, teaches us to sing,

God’s Word is our great heritage and shall be ours forever;

to spread its light from age to age shall be our chief endeavor.

Through life it guides our way, in death it is our stay.

Lord, grant while worlds endure, we keep its teachings pure throughout all generations.

May God grant us the strength to will and to do this good and loving work.