



Ten Reasons Why I Love This Church

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1. We focus on Jesus Christ and the Gospel

Jesus is the heart and soul of our life and teachings. He is also the heart of Scripture for us. Preaching is about Jesus, our Lord and Savior and his gospel message of love and new life for all. Salvation is the pure gift of God in and through Jesus. The theological and Biblical emphasis in our church is on **grace**. It is not focused on certain sins that are used as a judging barometer of who is really Christian, and who is not. Rather, we accept that all are sinners that Christ loves all sinners, and sin does not keep a person out of the church. Faith is not "belief in beliefs," but belief and trust in Jesus the first and final Word of God to all humanity.

2. Congregations in the ELCA are not alone or isolated

There are 10,000 congregations in our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (139 congregations in our Synod). We have a global perspective. All of us subscribe to the same goals and shared mission projects in 90 countries. Each congregation is part of the same support of missionaries, seminaries and colleges, and hundreds of ministries of love in Christ's name. There is something really good about being accountable. There is something really healthy about being connected to this large a group of lay folks, professors, pastors, rostered leaders, missionaries and resources that keeps us from becoming too turned in on our own four walls. I love the fact that such partnerships challenge us and move us from being "mission-lite" to being "mission-generous."

3. We receive support

When there is a problem, our synods provide help. When congregations need a pastor, the ELCA is well connected through Candidacy Committees, synods, Bishops, Regions, and seminaries to help find a pastor that "fits." Congregations choose their own pastors and synods make sure candidates are qualified and accountable to the expectations set forth by our church. If there is misconduct, this church deals with it right away. Zero tolerance for sexual misconduct is our standard and the ELCA is known for being very effective in removing predators on its rosters. Background checks are thorough, not merely surface level. If there is need for help in getting a congregation into a better giving pattern, or into a faithful mission pattern, there are people and resources available.

4. There are appropriate "boundaries" in this church

Pastors in our church regularly reach out into their communities with pastoral care when asked and yet do not "sheep steal" from other denominations. We are respectful of other Christians and differing religions while maintaining evangelical mission and holistic ministry to any person in the midst of their needs. The Lutherans in Palestine are a perfect example of this, working diligently with all religions to bring about health and peace.

5. We are able to embrace diversity while being united in Christ.

Members of our congregations are not told how to think or who to vote for. No one can bind another's conscience. We are not afraid to practice "dialog" with our own folks or other denominations with regard to pertinent issues. Mutual conversation about faith and life is a great Lutheran historical practice. Different ethical understandings on tough issues and political views need not be church-dividing, since we are connected to the one thing that really matters: The Gospel of Jesus Christ!

6. We are committed to understanding Scripture

Luther's continuous phrase in his small Catechism is "*What does this Mean?*" ELCA Lutherans try to "dig deep" when it comes to Bible passages; careful to find out the background of the texts as well as allowing the texts to speak to us, motivate us, change us, and challenge us. In the "Book of Faith" initiative of the ELCA, four methods are highlighted with regard to understanding Scripture: Devotional, Historical, Literary Reading, and Lutheran Theological. All invite us to understand the passage in light of Christ.

7. All people are welcome to our ministries

Since Jesus Christ is Lord of the church, we accept all those he accepts. In Jesus words and deeds; in his teachings and parables we see how passionate he was about breaking down barriers that kept some people "outside" and apart from others. Congregations do ministry for all people - no exceptions!

8. We are "okay" with paradox

Our understanding of faith embraces the mysteries that cannot be fully explained. Some examples: Jesus Christ is both God and human, Christians are both saint and sinner, the Kingdom of God is both now and future. Here's more paradox: The "Word of God" is three things for us: Jesus Christ incarnate, Law and Gospel centering in Christ, and the Old and New Testaments are God's written Word where God's Spirit speaks to us to show forth Christ and create and sustain faith and fellowship.

9. We have learned "accompaniment" as a healthy model of evangelism:

The Great Commission and the Great Commandment go together. "Go into all the world and make disciples" is balanced by "love God and love your neighbor as yourself." Sharing our faith to the whole world is vital. This means our backyard as well as across the oceans. ELCA Lutherans have grown by experience to see that "accompaniment" is the pathway to witnessing the faith with integrity. In other words, we can walk a mile in another person or community's shoes before we unload a barrage of doctrinal assertions.

10. We are committed to a Sacramental theology

Baptism and Holy Communion are sacred events or sacraments. God acts in them. Baptism and Holy Communion are more than mere "symbols" of the Spirit's work, they actually are the Spirit at work in our lives. They are channels or means of God's grace to us that initiate and strengthen our faith journey. "Conversion" is not a one-time event, but an ongoing process where the "old self" is put to death and the "new self" is brought to life in us. Repentance is a return to our baptism. Communion is eating and drinking at the Table of our Lord to be nourished into his life. In both cases, something real and beyond our comprehension takes place by the grace of God which prepares us for service in God's world. We never outgrow our need for this sacramental grace.