

Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Course Profile

Course # and Title RHTH 406, “Grace Incarnate: Lutheran Confessional Heritage”

Instructors: Mark N. Swanson **Semester/Year:** January term 2021

Class days: MTWThF, January 4-8; MTWThF, January 11-15; T January 19 and Th January 21
(for a total of 12 days between January 4th and January 21st)

Class time: 9 am – noon

Short Description:

As future ordained leaders, this course explores the Lutheran confessional heritage; equips students to have a lively sense of what in it is life-giving and gift to the Church and the world (and what in it may need repentance and rethinking); understand how it can inform issues of church and society (with the help of recent ecumenical, denominational, and global Lutheran experience); and clarifies the significance of that heritage for their own faith journeys.

Delivery mode: synchronous online, using Zoom™. Individual or small-group meetings with the instructor, whether on Zoom™ or in person (masked and socially-distanced), can be arranged.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Please read Chapters 1-3 of Gassmann and Hendrix, *Fortress Introduction to the Lutheran Confessions*, before the first day of class.

Course Rationale and Description

(Why do we offer this course? Which of LSTC’s degree program learning outcomes does it address?):

The Lutheran church identifies itself as a movement of reform within the Church catholic, with clear biblical, creedal, and confessional commitments. Scripture, the ecumenical creeds, and the Lutheran Confessions are viewed as normative resources for the life and mission of the church. The ELCA and other Lutheran bodies expect its leaders to pursue their ministries in accordance with these norms; ordained leaders will take solemn vows to this effect. It is crucial, therefore, that such leaders explore and become well-acquainted with the Lutheran confessional heritage; have a lively sense of what in it is life-giving and gift to the Church and the world (and what in it may need repentance and rethinking); understand how it can inform issues of church and society (with the help of recent ecumenical, denominational, and global Lutheran experience); and clarify the significance of that heritage for their own faith journeys.

The course addresses a variety of LSTC’s stated MDiv/MA/MAM program outcomes/competencies, **in particular:** #1, Personal and Spiritual Formation; and #3, History and Theology. A student who has taken this class should be able to

- **Articulate** basic understandings of the ... practices and theological accents of [the Lutheran] heritage; **describe** ways these practices and theological accents shape one's daily life [and ministry]; and **interpret** human life through the narratives and concepts of [this] heritage. (**Personal and Spiritual Formation**)
- **Incorporate** key tenets of the Lutheran confessional heritage and their meaning into one's life and the life of the world; **create** and **present** oral and written presentations that interpret [the Lutheran] heritage in ways responsible to [its] central texts. (**History and Theology**)

Course Learning **Outcomes** (Learners will be able to):

(What *difference* will this course make to students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices?)

This course should enable the student to:

1. Find one's way around the *Book of Concord* (with special familiarity with the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Catechisms*) in such a way as to be able to follow arguments which cite it, look passages up for oneself, and to make one's own theologically informed judgments.
2. Articulate the key teachings of the Lutheran Confessions, and the significance (for individuals, communities, and the church as a whole) of the debates that resulted in them. (What was *at stake* in all these debates?)
3. Describe ways in which these teachings shape (or *could* shape) daily life, congregational practice, and witness in the world today. (What, if anything, is the *continuing relevance* of the Lutheran Confessions?)
4. Be conversant with recent ecumenical agreements and statements of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran World Federation, with attention to the ways in which they seek *both* to address the divided state of the Christian world and pressing social issues, *and* to remain faithful to the Confessional heritage.

Strategies for Learning:

(How shall we go about achieving these outcomes?)

1. **Intensive reading.** There will be daily reading assignments: in the principal textbook, in *The Book of Concord*, and in contemporary ELCA and LWF statements.
2. Students will prepare for every class a **very short reflection paper** (not more than 1-2 pages, if printed) on the assigned readings, with three paragraphs:
 - (a) a **discovery** (*aha!* – a realization, epiphany, something that helps you to understand ... the Gospel, the history of Christian theology, the way Lutherans talk or behave, etc.);
 - (b) a **musings** (*hmm...* – something you find yourself wondering about, thinking about, waking up in the middle of the night wrestling with ...);
 - (c) a **question** (*huh?* – something that you would really like a response to, and that would help you to understand what is going on).

Students are asked to do their best to craft three paragraphs that concisely state their discoveries/musings/questions, with some explanation as to why these matters engage or strike (enlighten, occupies, trouble, etc.) them.

- Each student will select one of the ecumenical agreements or social statements/teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or the Lutheran World Federation (some are listed below, and the list can be expanded), and be prepared to make a **presentation** on it in class: What *is* this statement? What does it seek to do? How does it go about its work? In what ways does it use/interpret/build upon the Lutheran confessional documents? After the class presentation, students may have until the following Monday to write up their work in the form of a **5-8 page paper**.
- At our final meeting on Thursday, January 21st, we will take some time to ask: What are the most significant learnings we take from this class? Come prepared to share your ideas. Perhaps already before this class time, but certainly in the days immediately afterwards, write up your answer to this question in not less than 5 pages. This **final reflection paper** is due by Monday, January 25th.

Assessment:

(How shall we know if we—students and instructors—have been successful in achieving the outcomes?)

This class will be an ongoing conversation in which students and instructor will give feedback to one another, including prompt written feedback on papers. Papers will be assessed on the basis of: (a) care of reading and engagement with the texts; (b) capacity to articulate the teachings of the Confessions; (c) depth of reflection on the significance of the Confessions today, e.g. for individuals, congregational life, ecumenical relationships, or witness in the world.

Final grades will be based on participation in this intensive experience, the daily reflection papers, the two short papers, and the class presentation. Students will fill in a final course evaluation.

Bibliography:

First of all, it is **required** than everyone have a copy of *The Book of Concord*. The best edition of this is now:

Text Title	Editors	ISBN# (Required)
<i>The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church</i>	Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert	ISBN-10: 9780800627409 ISBN-13: 978-0800627409

Unfortunately, this book costs about \$50. Consider this an important investment!

Plus, a **required** textbook:

Text Title	Authors	ISBN# (Required)
<i>Fortress Introduction to the Lutheran</i>	Günther Gassmann and	ISBN-10: 0800631625

<i>Confessions</i> . Paperback.	Scott Hendrix.	ISBN-13: 978-0800631628
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The following book has been used in the past as a textbook in this course. If you are interested in more on the *history* of the production of the Lutheran Confessions, you will find it helpful:

Text Title	Authors	ISBN# (Required)
<i>The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of The Book of Concord</i> . Paperback.	Charles P. Arand, Robert Kolb, and James A. Nestingen	ISBN-10: 0800627415 ISBN-13: 978-0800627416

In addition to these works, we shall read a number of ecumenical agreements and statements of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran World Federation – all of which are available online. For example:

A. Ecumenical agreements and dialogue reports, with ...

1. The Reformed churches:

Formula of Agreement (1997), a relationship of full communion of the ELCA with the PCUSA, RCA, and UCC:
http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/A_Formula_of_Agreement.pdf

Formula of Agreement frequently cites the *Leuenberg Agreement* (or *Leuenberger Konkordie*, 1973) between European Lutheran and Reformed churches. An English translation may conveniently be found in an article by a South African scholar (at pp. 3-6): <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/hts/v65n1/53.pdf>

2. The Catholic Church:

Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification – The Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church (1999):
<https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Joint%20Declaration%20on%20the%20Doctrine%20of%20Justification.pdf>
OR
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cathluth-joint-declaration_en.html.

There is an excellent commentary, *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: A Commentary*, by the Ecumenical Institute, Strasbourg, France. A copy has been posted to our course website.

3. The Moravian Church:

Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion – the report of the dialogue between the ELCA and the Moravian Church in America, adopted in 1999:
http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Following_Our_Shepherd_To_Full_Communion.pdf

4. The Episcopal Church (ECUSA):

Called to Common Mission (1999), a relationship of full communion with The Episcopal Church:
http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Called_To_Common_Mission.pdf

See also the joint *Commentary on “Called to Common Mission”* (2002):

https://www.episcopalarchives.org/sites/default/files/sceir/lutheran/Lutheran_TEC_Commentary_CCM_2002.pdf

5. The Methodist Church (UMC):

Confessing Our Faith Together, a proposal for full communion between the ELCA and the UMC, adopted in 2009:

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Confessing_Our_Faith_Together.pdf

6. The Mennonite Churches

From the international (LWF) dialogue: *Healing Memories, Reconciling in Christ: Report of the Lutheran-Mennonite Study Commission* (2010):

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Healing_Memories_Reconciling_In_Christ.pdf

From the US dialogue: *Right Remembering in Anabaptist Lutheran Relations: Report of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – Mennonite Church (USA) Liaison Committee* (2004):

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Right_Remembering_In_Anabaptist_Lutheran_Relations.pdf

7. The Pentecostal Churches

A formal international (LWF) Lutheran–Pentecostal Dialogue was begun in 2016. Materials in preparation for this dialogue have been published by the Ecumenical Institute in Strasbourg:

Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, *A Guide to Pentecostal Movements for Lutherans* (2016):

<https://www.strasbourg-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Guide-to-Pentecostal-Movements-for-Lutherans.pdf>

Lutherans and Pentecostals in Dialogue (2010):

<https://strasbourg-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Lutherans-and-Pentecostals-in-Dialogue-Text-FINAL.pdf>

B. Global Lutheran conversations

See the various Study Documents of the Lutheran World Federation, including:

The Church in the Public Space (2015):

https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/exhibit_9.3_the_church_in_the_public_space_a_study_document_of_the_lwf_0.pdf

The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion (2015): https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/dtpw-self-understanding_communion_2015_1.pdf

C. Policy Statements of the ELCA

Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (1989) and *A Declaration of Ecumenical Commitment: A Policy Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (1991):

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/The_Vision_Of_The_ELCA.pdf

A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment: A policy statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (**proposal**, to be brought to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 2019):

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Inter-Religious_Policy_Statement.pdf

D. Social Messages and Social Statements of the ELCA

A complete list of the Social Messages of the ELCA, with links to pdf copies, may be found here:

<https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages> .

A complete list of the Social Statements of the ELCA, with links to pdf copies, may be found here:

<https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements> .

Additional information:

For more information about this class, please contact Prof. Mark Swanson at msonson@lsc.edu.