

A Report on the Situation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England (ELCE) and its Relationship to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of England [ELCE] consists of 13 congregations throughout Great Britain, including one in Wales, one in Scotland, and 11 in England. To these congregations belong approximately 1000 communicant members, or 1500 baptised. The ELCE dates from 1896 and 1901 when the first two congregations were founded in north London, and were attached to the Atlantic District of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod [LCMS]. On 1 January 1954 the ELCE established itself as an autonomous partner church of the LCMS. She then began a mission expansion plan, while receiving generous financial support from the LCMS and pastors from both the LCMS and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia. Between 1954 and 1972 the ELCE grew to 16 congregations, of which 3 have recently closed. The confessional position of the ELCE is best stated by quoting article II of its constitution:

The ELCE, its congregations and members, accept without reservation:

1. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the inspired and infallible Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and practice.
2. The Symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true statement and exposition of the holy Scriptures, to wit: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Small Catechism, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord.

In accordance with these, the Law and Gospel shall be taught and proclaimed whole and clear and all doctrinal and religious controversies which may arise shall be decided.

The ELCE is a founding member of the International Lutheran Theological Conference (now the International Lutheran Council [ILC]), and regards itself to be in altar and pulpit fellowship with the other member churches of the ILC. The ELCE has no official relationship with the Lutheran World Federation [LWF].

Within Great Britain there are a number of other churches that have some relationship to the LWF. The Lutheran Church in Great Britain [LCiGB], which like the ELCE is an English-speaking church, is a member church of the LWF. Various other Lutheran churches hold services around Britain in other languages, most of whom are related to the LWF through their mother churches in Europe and elsewhere. In the post-war period of 1946–49, Britain saw a great influx of displaced persons from Europe. In order to provide spiritual care to the tens of thousands of Lutherans among these refugees, the Lutheran Council of Great Britain was formed in 1948 by the ELCE and representatives of the other European Lutheran churches in Britain. The Council received financial support on a 50/50 basis from both American bodies, the National Lutheran Council and the LCMS. This arrangement continued until 1955, at which time the LCMS judged that the emergency need had been met. At that time only the ELCE and the Polish Lutheran Church in Exile chose to maintain their relationship with the LCMS, while the other Lutheran churches chose to be linked with the LWF. In 1957 the Lutheran Free Conference was formed for theological dialogue, with a committee of one representative from each Lutheran church meeting about four times a year, and a plenary Free Conference for all Lutheran pastors being held annually. In recent years such Free Conferences have been infrequent, but the pastors of the ELCE have expressed their desire that they be held more regularly.

Because of the scattered and isolated nature of Lutheran congregations in Great Britain, we have often recognised the need to provide spiritual care in ELCE congregations to Lutherans from churches outside our immediate fellowship. In doing so we work within the spirit of the inter-Lutheran chaplaincy agreement, which was originally designed for collegial and military situations. If a Lutheran from outside our fellowship, who is located near an ELCE congregation for an extended period of time, expresses a confessional commitment by seeking a Lutheran congregation, placing himself under its spiritual care, and sharing our confession of the Real Presence, such a person may be invited to become a guest communicant member. The ELCE respects the discretion of the local pastor in such cases.