



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC): Congregational Life Comparison

Theology/Doctrine

- **Authority of Scripture** – The differences between the Lutheran Church bodies are subtle yet meaningful:
 1. The ELCA believes that the Bible is the written and inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith and life. They respect individual interpretations of the Bible, yet always through the lens of Jesus' person, life and witness.
 - The LCMC believes the Bible as the inspired Word of God and the sole authoritative source of their proclamation, faith and life. They reject any notion that science, personal experience, or other human endeavors have equal footing with the Bible, which is the final authority in matters of faith/practice.
- **Family/Marriage/Divorce** – Both the ELCA and the LCMC believe that family/marriage is ordained and instituted by God with divorce being discouraged.

The primary difference between the synods is that the LCMC believes that marriage is between one man and one woman. While the ELCA permits congregations to find ways to hold publicly accountable same-gender relationships that are lifelong and monogamous (without referring to this as marriage), many within the church still believe that marriage is only between one man and one woman. The ELCA lacks consensus on this matter, but understands that different beliefs follow from strongly held different understandings of Scripture, and asks all to respect the conscience bound belief of their neighbor.

- **Sexuality** – The LCMC affirms that God created us male and female, and that it is God's intention that human sexual expression takes place only within the boundaries of marriage between one man and one woman. While some in the ELCA share this belief, others feel that those whose bound conscience dictates may participate in same sex, lifelong and monogamous relationships. The ELCA recently published a social statement acknowledging that its members are not in agreement regarding same-gender relationships, and identifying different perspectives present.
- **Pastoral and Lay Leadership** – There are two major differences between the synods:
 2. ELCA allows individuals in publicly accountable, lifelong, same-gender relationships to serve as clergy, and encourages bound conscience as a primary interaction principle where these decisions are involved.
 3. LCMC does not allow pastors in same sex relationships to serve.
- **Sacraments** – Both synods believe in only 2 sacraments – Holy Communion and Baptism – and have similar beliefs on their meaning and significance.
- **Bible Version** – Neither the ELCA or LCMC mandates any particular version or translation of the Bible, and leave it to congregational discretion.



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Financials

- **Benefits** – While both the ELCA and LCMC offer similar life insurance and long-term disability, only the ELCA offers short-term disability. The individual LCMC benefits are not bundled together and are offered to all employees of the congregation.
- **Retirement** – Both the ELCA and LCMC offer a retirement program. Funds in the 403b portion of the ELCA pension fund may be rolled over to the LCMC retirement plan.
- **Continuing Education** – The ELCA offers several formal continuing education opportunities, whereas the LCMC leaves this fully to congregational discretion.
- **Property** – The LCMC allows each congregation to control their own property and assets. The ELCA requires property control to be defined in the congregation's constitution. An ELCA congregation's synod history and future affiliation choices drive whether ownership is retained by
 - a) the portion of the congregation seeking to leave the ELCA
 - b) the portion of the congregation wishing remain affiliated with the ELCA, or
 - c) the ELCA.
- **Benevolence** – While neither synod mandates benevolence, the ELCA does share synod expectations for giving, and the LCMC does encourage a 10% tithe with full congregational discretion as to where the benevolence is given.

Governance

- **Constitution** – Both the ELCA and LCMC have a governing synod constitution. As for congregational constitutions, while the ELCA provides a model constitution and requires synod approval, the LCMC does not require synod approval, yet requires alignment with LCMC constitution/bylaws
- **Affiliation Process** – GLC is already affiliated with the ELCA. The LCMC is easy to join and leave, and allows for joint affiliation (e.g., belonging to both ELCA and LCMC) at a congregational level. A pastor must choose to be affiliated with ELCA or LCMC, not both.
- **Accountability** – Both the ELCA and LCMC outline pastoral and congregational expectations as well as explicit disciplinary consequences.
- **Representation/Voting** – In the ELCA, congregations have no direct representation in the 1000 delegates that vote at the Churchwide Assembly (CWA). In LCMC, congregations have direct representation by selecting voting delegates at the Annual Gathering. Furthermore, LCMC constitution and bylaw changes must be ratified by majority vote of all member congregations.
- **Structure/Hierarchy**
 - ELCA = 1 churchwide synod, 65 synods, and 10,500 congregations
 - LCMC = 1 Board of Trustees, 9 districts, 249 congregations



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- **Call Process** – Biggest differences are as follows:
 - ELCA requires that pastors be called from an approved list and requires synod involvement at key stages throughout the call process.
 - LCMC allows congregations to select and call whomever they choose. While the LCMC validates that a candidate is properly ordained and available for call, they require no further synodical involvement or approval.

Resources/Practices

- **Printed Materials** – The ELCA has its own publishing house that offers a large variety of resources for worship, education and personal reading; they also provide suggestions for weekly liturgy, readings and sermons, however does not require their use. The LCMC allows congregational discretion as to what resources are used, with most congregations using publicly available material (including material published by the ELCA).
- **Pastoral Supply** – Both the ELCA and the LCMC provide a list of available pastors for pulpit supply/interim.
- **Camps/Colleges/Seminaries** – While the ELCA provides seminary, school and camp options, the LCMC does not and cooperates with others that are available.

Identity

- **Outreach/Evangelism** – The following differences exist:
 - ELCA has connections with Lutheran/interfaith organizations, has various campus/outdoor ministries and social service agencies, and establishes mission congregations.
 - LCMC encourages mission church and missionary support directly through member congregations.