

# North American Lutheran Church

## Application for Full Membership in the Lutheran World Federation

### Questions and Answers

**Why is the North American Lutheran Church (NALC) applying for membership in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)?** Because the Constitution of the NALC states, “the NALC shall participate in inter-Lutheran, ecumenical and inter-religious relationships as a part of its ministry and mission,” the Executive Council of the NALC has recommended that we apply for full membership in LWF with voice and vote.

**How did this process begin?** In fact, the NALC affirmed application for membership in LWF at the August 2011 Convocation when it unanimously approved “An Initial Statement on the Ecumenical and Inter-Lutheran Commitment of the North American Lutheran Church”, which affirms: "As an initial strategy the North American Lutheran Church will...apply for membership in the Lutheran World Federation..."

**What is the Lutheran World Federation?** The LWF is, by self-definition, “a global communion of Christian churches in the Lutheran tradition. Founded in 1957 in Lund, Sweden, the LWF now has 145 member churches in 79 countries all over the world representing over 70 million Christians.”

**What is the purpose of LWF?** According to its constitution, the LWF

- † “furthers the united witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and strengthens the member churches in carrying out the missionary command and in their efforts toward Christian unity worldwide;
- † furthers worldwide among the member churches diaconic action, alleviation of human need, promotion of peace and human rights, social and economic justice, care for God’s creation and sharing of resources;
- † furthers through cooperative study the self-understanding and the communion of member churches and helps them to act jointly in common tasks.”

**What does the LWF believe?** LWF consists of member churches which accept the “Doctrinal Basis” as stated in the LWF constitution: “The Lutheran World Federation confesses the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the only source and norm of its doctrine, life and service. It sees in the three Ecumenical Creeds and in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, especially in the unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism of Martin Luther, a pure exposition of the Word of God.”

**Why would we want to belong to the LWF?** We believe that being part of this global Lutheran communion will provide us with an important voice and vote in this international association of Lutherans. It is the only truly global fellowship of Lutherans with member churches in the global south as well as the north. Our fellow Lutherans in Ethiopia and Tanzania, in particular, have asked us to become full members of the LWF to provide an orthodox and confessional Lutheran partner in North America.

**Does full membership in the LWF provide us with anything that can’t be gained apart from it?** The LWF is the primary Lutheran partner in international ecumenical relations between Lutherans and other Christian bodies, including the worldwide Anglican Communion, the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church. All international dialogues and activities happen between the LWF and these organizations. Apart from the LWF, we can have no involvement in official ecumenical interaction between Lutherans and others at the international level. Similarly, the LWF fosters regional relationships

and activities between member churches. We want to have both voice and vote for the sake of this regional cooperation as well as at the international level.

**Does full membership in the LWF imply or require full communion between member Lutheran churches?** The LWF constitution does not use the words “full communion,” but rather states, “The Lutheran World Federation is a communion of churches which confess the triune God, agree in the proclamation of the Word of God and are united in pulpit and altar fellowship.” LWF representatives recognize that this is a goal, but not a reality as many member churches are in what has been described as “impaired communion.” This means while we are part of the global Lutheran communion, that communion has been impaired at times between member churches. Lutheran member churches in Ethiopia and Tanzania explain their full membership in the LWF in a similar way. In any case, NALC congregations retain the responsibility for determining who shall preach and preside within their local congregation and for establishing practices regarding the reception of the sacrament in their own congregations.

**We’ve heard that the LWF is an extremely “liberal” organization, politically. Is this the case?**

Many Lutherans have had concerns about the direction of the LWF within the last two or three decades. In recent years, the LWF has engaged in an intentional redirecting of focus, beginning with the proposals made by the Renewal Committee (2007-2009), incorporated into a new *LWF Strategy 2012-2017: The LWF Communion—With Passion for the Church and for the World*. The first part of this strategy addresses “Who We Are As A Communion,” lifting up first and foremost that to be Lutheran is to be evangelical, proclaiming the good news of Christ’s life, his death on the cross and his resurrection...” While this LWF work of renewal is ongoing, we believe we have gifts and perspective to contribute to this continuing reform.

**What is the process of application for membership into the LWF?** An application, as approved by the Executive Council of the NALC has been submitted, with required supporting documentation. An initial consultation has taken place. Now a recommendation has come to the NALC 2012 Convocation from the Executive Council for approval. If approved, this action requires ratification by 2/3 of our NALC congregations, as provided by NALC Constitution 13.03 “All inter-Lutheran and ecumenical church-to-church relationships of an official character shall require the approval of two-thirds of the votes cast at a Convocation, and shall require ratification by congregations...” If ratified, the LWF will act on our application, either by reception into membership by the Federation in the Assembly, or in the interim, by the LWF Council.

**What if the resolution for full LWF membership fails in the Convocation vote, or fails to be ratified by the required 2/3 NALC congregations voting?** Our application for membership will be withdrawn.

**Are other Lutheran bodies in North America full members in the LWF?** The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Lutheran Church-Canada are not members of the Lutheran World Federation. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada are full members. Other North American members are: Lutheran Costa Rican Church; Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope; Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras; Salvadoran Lutheran Church.

**How can we get more information, or have our other questions answered?** You can find answers at [www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org), or by e-mailing NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, [dwendel@thenalc.org](mailto:dwendel@thenalc.org), or NALC General Secretary, [mchavez@thenalc.org](mailto:mchavez@thenalc.org).