

We believe in the Holy Spirit: Welcome to a Global Conversation on Being Lutheran

Introduction

A Global Study Process on Lutheran Identity: We believe in the Holy Spirit: From 2019-2022, the LWF is engaged in a global study of contemporary Lutheran identities as they are lived in local church contexts. The study process features dynamic theological reflection and creative opportunities for participation. The aim is to listen for ways that we sound the common notes of Lutheran identity among the rich harmony of lived, contextual identities across our communion. Participants of the consultation developed these discussion questions to explore the way baptism, belief and practices shape the ways Lutherans live out our tradition in diverse contexts.

You are fundamental to this process! This conversation is open to the communion. We encourage broad participation. This discussion guide is a tool to facilitate conversations at the national and local level: national churches, dioceses, deaneries or districts, in theological institutions, among parish councils, congregations, youth groups, Christian education classes, or for individual reflection.

Congregations or communities of practice are encouraged to host an event or a series of conversations in small groups to discuss the questions. Feedback can be collated on this form. Groups may choose to reflect on all of the questions, or they may wish to focus on some questions from each of the categories.

Written responses can be recorded in the text boxes provided. Congregations or groups may submit collated responses to their national church or regional judicatory, or return them to the email below, clearly indicating their church affiliation. Individuals can also participate and submit their own responses. Written responses can be emailed to BeingLutheran@lutheranworld.org.

Alternatively, participants may wish to submit creative expressions that are inspired by these questions. We welcome art, music, or videos dramatizing what it means to be Lutheran. You may submit videos, images, art, or documents to BeingLutheran@lutheranworld.org.

Your responses are significant! Submissions will be received through 1 July, 2021. The information gathered is one way for us to experience our unity and diversity as a communion. The survey is anonymous, in the sense that respondents will not be identified when publishing the results. We request demographic information in order to identify regional trends. Analysis will be published and shared with member churches and participants. Thank you for taking the time to participate.

A. Participant(s) information

1. To which LWF member church or institution do you belong?

2. What is your role in the group (or the roles represented in the group, for example, lay member, teacher, student, ordained pastor, youth, diaconal worker, etc.)

3. Contact Information for the group or individual:

Name of contact: _____

Email contact: _____

Sex: (Male/ Female, or % of M/F balance) _____

Age (or age range of group present):

- under 18
- 18-30
- 31-45
- 46-65
- 66 and above

B. Instructions for individuals or facilitating a group conversation

Questions are divided into **Standardized Questions** and **Regional Specific Questions**.

Standardized: The standardized questions are for all participants, regardless of region. There are 5 categories of these questions (*Lutheran Identity, Holy Spirit as Gift and Promise, The Church as Communion, Transformed and Freed: Spiritual Gifts and Vocations, Mission and Renewal*). Each category contains 6 questions. You may choose to respond to each one, or you may select a few in each section.

Regional Specific: Regional sections contain 5 questions that were created by consultation participants from each LWF region. Please answer the questions that correspond to your region.

Each section has a brief explanation of the topic, and a related Bible verse. Questions are open ended, designed to facilitate group discussion. You may record responses as a list of main points, a narrative summary of the conversation, or short quotes. Text boxes are provided.

Special instructions for group facilitation: If your church, congregational group, class or organization is hosting a joint conversation, you will want to pay attention to the aesthetics of facilitation.

- Create a welcoming and hospitable space.
- Be clear about the amount of time that will be spent discussing each of the questions.
- Open with prayer, asking the Spirit to open your hearts, inspire your faithful reflection, and to use this opportunity to nurture our baptismal faith, and our unity in the body of Christ.
- Ensure a space safe for sharing, and that everyone has the opportunity to contribute.
- At the end of a session, share your gratitude for one another's participation.

C. Standardized Questions

I. *On Lutheran identity (6 questions)*

Our religious identities are formed in a matrix of normativity and experience that includes all of the *solae* (Word alone, grace alone, Christ alone, faith alone), our confessional, theological tradition, liturgical tradition as well as the pluralistic societies in which our cultural tradition is formed, multiple religious belonging, and traditional or indigenous belief systems. In this way, the Lutheran tradition is always living, and the expressions are always being negotiated and renewed.

- Name 5 elements that describe what it means to be Lutheran?

- My Lutheran identity was formed by... (*open sentence*)

- What traditions do you cherish in your practice of faith?

- What distinctive teachings of your Lutheran heritage impact your daily life?

- In your context, what role does:

- worship and music play in the formation of Lutheran identity?

- Luther's Catechism play in the formation of Lutheran identity?

- Lutheran confessions play in the formation of Lutheran identity?

- prayer and other spiritual practices play in the formation of Lutheran identity?

- cultural, ethnic, or ancestral traditions play in the formation of Lutheran identity?

- What difference does it make to be Lutheran?

II. *Holy Spirit as Gift and Promise (6 questions)*

These questions focus on the Holy Spirit. In Luther's Small Catechism, the creed reminds us that our faith is grounded in the work of the Trinity. In Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit as a gift and a promise. God's Spirit creates and renews the earth, calls and claims each of us in our baptism to bear the fruit of good works in us. Creation is the theatre for the work of the Holy Spirit. God operates in the world at large.

Bible verse: John 14:25- 27 "All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

- In what ways do you experience God's presence in the liturgy of your church?

- When and where does the Holy Spirit work?

- How do Indigenous or traditional beliefs and cultural practices inform your concept of God's Spirit?

- What opportunities exist in your context for children and youth to explore/nurture faith?

- What are the most dynamic ways that your church expresses God's love in your context?

III. The Church as Communion (6 questions)

The Catechism teaches us that the church is part of the communion of saints, in which the Spirit acts to sanctify and form us. Worship, music and spiritual practices around the Word and sacraments nurture our faith, along with all the marks of the church: prayer, fellowship, solidarity in suffering, service, Bible study, and more.

Bible Verse: 1 Corinthians 12:1-14 “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed...For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.”

- How would you describe spirituality in your church or context?

- How do hymns, prayers, and liturgies shape your understanding of the Holy Spirit?

- Name three ways that you see the Holy Spirit at work in your congregation and community?

- How does

- prayer impact your daily life?
- the Bible impact your daily life?
- Holy Communion impact your daily life?

- What role do youth and children play in the life of your church or community of practice?

- How do you teach the Lutheran tradition?

IV. *Transformed and Freed: Spiritual gifts and vocations (6 questions)*

These questions focus on aspects of spirituality, and invite us to explore the relationship between spiritual gifts and vocation. The Holy Spirit produces fruit in each one of us. As part of the priesthood of all the baptized, we are called and freed to express our spiritual gifts (*charismata*) through our diverse vocations in the world. We test our spiritual gifts (*and particularly the reality of different types of spiritualities as experienced today*) against the biblical call that gifts are always used to build up the body of Christ towards reconciliation and loving service to our neighbor.

Bible Verse: Galatians 5:1, 22-25 "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit."

- How does being baptized affect the way you live your daily life
 - in your family?

- in your community?

- in your occupation or field of interest?

- as a citizen?

- What is a spiritual gift?

- Name up to 4 spiritual gifts that you have?

- How does gender affect the way your church talks about spiritual gifts?

- How are you able to express your spiritual gifts in your church?

- How do you or your community discern the difference between a gift of the Spirit and someone's personal will?

V. Mission and Renewal (6 questions)

The Holy Spirit calls and equips us, to participate in God’s Mission. Lutherans continually, prayerfully, and communally returning to the Bible and our theological and confessional tradition to ask new questions that emerge from our experience. This “hermeneutical cycle” of discerning our vocation in our time and context helps us find new creative expressions of our living faith that speak to contemporary issues, particularly in relationship to the wellbeing of our neighbours, justice, care for creation, sustainable economies of life, reconciliation of peoples and renewal of the church.

Bible Verse: Psalm 104: 30-31, “When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works.”

- In your context, what is the most important part of God’s work in the world today?

- How does the Holy Spirit shape the way you engage in:
 - social or political issues in your context?
 - economic issues in your context?
 - care for creation in your context?
 - Gender Justice in your context?

- How do you express your faith in pluralistic, public space?

- Do you experience the God’s Spirit at work outside the church? If so in what ways?

- Does your church promote wellbeing or healing from trauma? If so, in what ways?

- Where do you see signs of renewal in your church today? Where does your church need renewal or transformation?

D. Regional Specific Questions

Please answer the questions corresponding to your region of the LWF.

Africa (5 questions)

- What local, traditional or indigenous beliefs shape Lutheran teaching about the Holy Spirit?

- How do you respond to those who exploit spiritual gifts for financial gain?

- How does our Lutheran self-understanding equip you to respond to the idea that God blesses faithful people with material goods or power?

- What gifts do your context offer to the global Lutheran tradition?

- What does your church need to receive as a gift from the global Lutheran communion?

Asia (5 questions)

- How do you experience the Holy Spirit in your Asian cultural context?

- How does religious pluralism inform your understanding of God's Spirit?

- How do we address the spiritual needs of youth in our context?

- What gifts do your context offer to the global Lutheran tradition?

- What does your church need to receive as a gift from the global Lutheran communion?

Central and Eastern Europe (5 questions)

- How do we better elaborate the connection between the gifts of the Spirit and our understanding of the church?

- Does the Holy Spirit work primarily through individuals, or in communities?

- How do we express the comforting role of the Holy Spirit in our churches? Do we need more institutions for spiritual care, retreat centers, etc. in our churches?

- What gifts do your context offer to the global Lutheran tradition?

- What does your church need to receive as a gift from the global Lutheran communion?

Central and Western Europe (5 questions)

- How do we relate to the social and political spheres as the realm of God's work?

- What challenges do you face in expressing faith in your context?

- How do you make disciples today?

- What gifts do your context offer to the global Lutheran tradition?

- What does your church need to receive as a gift from the global Lutheran communion?

Latin America and the Caribbean (5 questions)

- What indigenous traditions can you bring back from your history to inform our Lutheran Identity?

- How do indigenous hymns and spiritual practices form your worship?

- How can we discern the presence of the Holy Spirit in the congregation?

- What gifts do your context offer to the global Lutheran tradition?

- What does your church need to receive as a gift from the global Lutheran communion?

Nordic (5 questions)

- How can the ordination of women and men be an expression of the gifts of the Spirit?

- How does being a folk church inform Lutheran identity of the church?

- How does the history of state churches and their ethnicity affect the way we speak about the Spirit?

- What gifts do your context offer to the global Lutheran tradition?

- What does your church need to receive as a gift from the global Lutheran communion?

North America (5 questions)

- How do you hope the Holy Spirit might shape your future?

- How do you feel your Lutheran identity equips you to respond to the challenges of the world?

- Where do you believe God is calling us as a church?

- What gifts do your context offer to the global Lutheran tradition?

- What does your church need to receive as a gift from the global Lutheran communion?

E. General Comments

Is there anything more you would like to share with us?

Thank you for your response! We look forward to continuing communication.