

**International Lutheran-Pentecostal 2016–2022 Dialogue Statement:  
“The Spirit of the Lord Is Upon Me”**

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”  
Luke 4:18–19*

**Part I: Identity**

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . .”*

**Introduction**

1. At first glance, one might wonder why the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Pentecostal World Fellowship (PWF) would engage in ecumenical dialogue. On the surface, they appear to be so different that they would have little in common. Lutheran churches are confessional; Pentecostal churches are not. Generally speaking, Pentecostal worship is exuberant while Lutheran worship is more subdued. When we look more closely, however, we can find Lutheran churches such as the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus that are largely charismatic in practice, and we can find Pentecostal churches with a rich liturgical life, an episcopal structure, and a high view of the ordinances, such as the Church of God in Christ.
2. Lutherans and Pentecostals share the same world, which means that they share many of the same problems and opportunities. Ours is a world facing changes and challenges of all kinds: millions migrating from one place to another; the global pandemic of COVID-19 and its aftermath; environmental issues; secularism, religious plurality, and in some places the abandonment of religion altogether; poverty and broken economic and governmental systems.

3. As Pentecostals and Lutherans, together we confess Jesus Christ and his work as his Father's gracious and generous response to our sinfulness. Together we recognize the holy Scripture as the source of Gospel, which we proclaim through word and deed in a compassionate manner by the power of the Holy Spirit.
4. Therefore, recognizing this commonality, we also recognize that greater unity between our Christian families could provide strong hope for a world in crisis. Since both of our church families are concerned for the poor, greater unity could lead to increased cooperation in meeting their needs. Above all, disunity contradicts the desire that Jesus expressed in his prayer in John 17. So it is that we have committed ourselves to this quest to sustained dialogue by exploring together issues that may lead us to deeper unity in Christ.
5. To guide us in this task, we listened together to Luke 4:18–19. When Jesus spoke in the synagogue in Nazareth, he began his sermon with words from the prophet Isaiah (Is. 61:1–2, Lk. 4:18–19). After rolling up the scroll and handing it back to the attendant, Jesus sat down. The people of Jesus' hometown waited expectantly to hear what he might have to say about it. He startled the congregation by announcing, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." During this first official round of the international dialogue between members of the Lutheran World Federation and the Pentecostal World Fellowship, these words spoken by Isaiah and Jesus have shaped our conversations and defined the scope of this dialogue.
6. The foundation for this dialogue began in 1996 when Dr. Gunnar Stålsett, who had just completed his tenure as the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, invited Dr. Cecil M. Robeck to consider initiating a dialogue between Lutherans and Pentecostals. Due to transitions in leadership and pre-existing commitments, such as the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, fulfillment of that dream had to wait. In the interim, Dr. Sven Oppegaard, then Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs at the LWF, kept the dream alive. In 2004, Dr. Theodor Dieter and Dr. Kenneth Appold of the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France, invited a group of Pentecostals to explore the prospect of dialogue. Meeting in December 2004, this group proposed a five-year preliminary dialogue on the theme, "How Do We Encounter Christ?" Under the leadership of Dr. Kenneth Appold (Lutheran) and Dr. Jean-Daniel Plüss (Pentecostal), the group met annually between 2005 and 2010, discussing how we encounter Christ (a) when we speak of

the “pure Gospel” (Lutherans) or the “full Gospel” (Pentecostals), in (b) proclamation, (c) in the sacraments and ordinances, and (d) in the charisms. This “proto-dialogue” ultimately published a booklet titled *Lutherans and Pentecostals in Dialogue*.<sup>1</sup> The LWF provided official approval of a dialogue with Pentecostals following its 2010 General Assembly.

7. Dr. Walter Altmann (Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil) has served as the Lutheran Co-Chair, and Dr. Jean-Daniel Plüss (Swiss Pentecostal Mission, Switzerland) has served as the Pentecostal Co-Chair, throughout our time together. In 2016 we were hosted by Asia Pacific Theological Seminary in Baguio, Philippines, under the rubric of “Sent by the Spirit—Identity in Christ.” In honor of the Reformation anniversary, our 2017 meeting took place in Wittenberg, Germany, which focused on the theme “God Has Anointed Me to Proclaim.” In 2018 the dialogue met in Santiago, Chile, to discuss “Proclaiming Good News to the Poor.” The Malagasy Lutheran Church in Antananarivo, Madagascar, hosted the 2019 dialogue meeting on the theme, “Proclaim Release to the Captives and Recovery of Sight to the Blind, to Let the Oppressed Go Free.” Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were unable to meet in person in 2020 and 2021, but through personal correspondence and Zoom meetings we worked to draft this report. Our fifth and final in-person meeting was hosted by Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, USA in 2022 and finalized this Dialogue Statement.

### Who We Are

8. From the outset of our dialogue, we did not intend to engage in a basic exchange of information resulting in a comparative theological study. We have understood from the beginning that both Lutherans and Pentecostals find their true identity in Christ. Together we confess that we have a common understanding of the Trinity.<sup>2</sup> Together we confess that Jesus Christ is our Lord

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<sup>1</sup>*Lutherans and Pentecostals in Dialogue* (Strasbourg, France: Institute for Ecumenical Research / Pasadena, CA, USA: The David J. Du Plessis Center for Christian Spirituality / Zürich, Switzerland: The European Pentecostal Charismatic Research Association, 2010).

<sup>2</sup>Although the overwhelming majority of Classical Pentecostals believe and confess the Holy Trinity, some Pentecostals, who share the same historic roots, are known as Oneness or Jesus’ Name Pentecostals. They do not hold to

and Savior, which gives all that we say and do a Christocentric orientation. Together we also confess that the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives, in the church, and in the world. We recognize and confess the centrality of the word of God in our churches and in our lives. We both expect Christ's presence in our worship, and we both experience worship in all of its diversity as centrally formative of our Christian lives. We both understand the meaning of the Gospel as salvation that God the Father bestows through Jesus Christ. We understand that we are sent out to serve the world in proclamation, diakonia, and mission. And we both seek to contextualize the Gospel in diverse settings throughout the world. All of these confessions and understandings point to our unity in Christ.

9. Yet with all of these common confessions and understandings, we are different. The church by definition contains diversity. We have different histories. We have different church cultures. We prioritize our commitments in different ways. Sometimes we use words differently or fill them with different meanings. We want to understand one another better than we have in the past. As a result, at certain points in this document, we speak from our respective historical or ecclesial perspectives with the hope that we can grow together in our understanding of one another, as well as in our common life in Christ and in his church.

#### Lutherans: Identity

10. Lutheranism began as a distinct movement within the Western church in the sixteenth century. Augustinian friar Martin Luther, in no way intending to start a new church, raised questions about late medieval teaching and practice. While he quickly gained supporters in his native Germany and regions of northern and central Europe, he also gained many enemies. His teachings led to his eventual excommunication by the papacy (1521). In the years that followed, Luther translated the Bible into German, composed hymns, model sermons, and devotional materials, and wrote Catechisms that have profoundly shaped Lutheran spirituality ever since. Together with many colleagues, Luther reformed church practices, notably permitting clergy to marry and allowing the laity to receive the cup at communion. Efforts to resolve the conflict

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the Trinitarian doctrine of God of the early church councils. Only Trinitarian Pentecostals are represented in this dialogue.

between Luther's supporters and opponents were also pursued throughout the 1520s and culminated in the presentation of the Augsburg Confession in 1530 at the Diet of Augsburg. However, this effort did not achieve consensus. As a result, the Lutheran confessing movement (at the time simply called *evangelisch* or "evangelical") and those who remained within the papal church developed along different trajectories thereafter. Tragically, this conflict within the church led to a division into multiple mutually exclusive churches, as well as political partisanship and outright war. In the centuries to come, Lutheranism spread throughout Europe and traveled to every other continent by means of immigration and mission.

11. While Lutherans recognized each other and studied with each other across national boundaries, formal efforts toward global fellowship arose only in the twentieth century, first with the Lutheran World Convention (1923–1947) and then in 1947 with the establishment of the Lutheran World Federation. In 1984 at its Budapest Assembly the LWF established full altar and pulpit fellowship among its member churches. In 1990 at the Curitiba Assembly the LWF redefined its status in this way: "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 Constitution III.1). Today the LWF is comprised of 149 churches with a membership of 77 million people from 99 countries.<sup>3</sup>

#### Lutherans: Doctrine

12. Lutherans self-identify confessionally, meaning that they are not identified by a particular church structure, liturgy, or experience, but rather by their teaching. The Scripture is the *norma normans*—that is, the chief and final judge of all Christian teaching and practice. Lutherans also teach and confess the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds. They ascribe special and binding importance to the Lutheran Confessions of the sixteenth century. LWF member churches accept Martin Luther's Small Catechism (1529) and the Augsburg Confession (1530) as their doctrinal standard; most LWF member churches additionally recognize the entire Book of Concord (1580). Luther's other theological, devotional, and exegetical writings have been tremendously

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<sup>3</sup><https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/member-churches>.

important as well, along with his hymns. Lutheran churches ever since have continued to engage all these texts, interpreting them for their varied settings around the world and striving to teach according to them.

13. Among typical Lutheran emphases, in the context of this dialogue we wish to highlight in particular the following: confession of God the Holy Trinity; that Jesus Christ, truly human and truly divine, is both Savior and Lord; salvation as a purely gracious gift of God; justification by faith, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit and a “living, busy, active, mighty thing,”<sup>4</sup> and from which good works spring; the gracious and efficacious action of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper; that pure preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments are sufficient for the unity of the church; the necessity of an ordered, public ministry; the distinction between Law and Gospel; and the freedom of the Christian.

#### Lutherans: Experience

14. Although Lutherans identify themselves by their confessional teaching, this does not mean that they reject, deny, or disdain experience. Indeed, there are many and rich experiences that are typical of Lutheran practice: the hearing and reading of Scripture, hearing the Word preached in sermons, the reception of the sacraments, prayer, singing, the forgiveness of sins, koinonia, vocational calling, and faith itself. Furthermore, Pietist and charismatic movements within Lutheranism have particularly sought to enrich spiritual experience.
15. It is true, however, that Lutherans will often approach experience with caution. This itself may be said to be the result of their historical *experience* of the dangers the church runs when it accumulates practices and teachings without sufficient theological discernment. Further, Lutherans seek to test any given experience not only against Scripture, creeds, and confessions, but also against the experience of other persons, the congregation, the synod or national assembly, the global communion of the LWF, and the church throughout its two thousand-year journey. Following Luther’s terminology in the Heidelberg Disputation, many

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<sup>4</sup>Martin Luther, “Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans,” in *Luther’s Works* vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), 370.

Lutherans appeal to “the theology of the cross” as a criterion for spiritual discernment.

16. Luther comments: “This life, therefore, is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam and sparkle, but everything is being cleansed.”<sup>5</sup>

#### Pentecostals: Identity

17. The Pentecostal team represents Classical Pentecostals, whose roots go back to the beginning of the twentieth century. The best-known revival that gave rise to global Pentecostalism took place in 1906 at the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles, California, USA, itself foreshadowed by an experience of the outpouring of the Spirit in Topeka, Kansas, USA, in 1901. Alongside those revivals, there are recorded outpourings of Spirit at the turn of the twentieth century in India and elsewhere. Classical Pentecostals are found in all global contexts and number around 270 million. The diversity among them is considerable, which is why some people prefer to use the plural term “Pentecostalisms.” Alongside Classical Pentecostals, scholars identify two other related church groups. The first is the Charismatic Renewal, made up of members of historically older churches whose worship and practice is akin to those of Pentecostals. The second is the Neo-Charismatic movement, which includes all other charismatically-oriented Christian groups and churches that are not part of either Classical Pentecostals or Charismatics in historic churches. The total number of these three groups amounts to more than 600 million worldwide.

#### Pentecostals: Experience

18. Pentecostal identity, differing from that of churches whose origins lie farther back in history, is not based primarily on confessions, doctrinal formulae, or a united structure, but rather on a particular type of spiritual or charismatic experience, which is accompanied by the bestowal of spiritual gifts or charisms (1 Cor. 12:4–11 and

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<sup>5</sup>Martin Luther, “Defense and Explanation of the All the Articles,” in Luther’s Works vol. 32 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958), 24.

28; Rom. 12:4–8; Eph. 4:11–13). These gifts include healing, exorcism, and prophecy, though to outside observers the most spectacular and controversial gift is speaking in tongues or glossolalia. Accordingly, for Pentecostals, experience came first and doctrine followed, which Pentecostals understand to reflect the reality of the earliest period of the church.

19. Contrary to popular misunderstandings, Pentecostal spirituality has never focused or fixated on the Holy Spirit alone. Rather, it focuses on Jesus Christ. Pentecostals see their own experiences correlating with the narratives of the New Testament, particularly those in the Gospels and Acts in which Jesus Christ figures prominently as savior, healer, and helper in human need. Out of that experience-based, biblically-informed reflection process there has emerged what has been called the “Full Gospel” or “Foursquare Gospel” or “Fivefold Gospel” (depending on how much emphasis is given to sanctification). This means that, in the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ is continuing the ministry that he was doing in biblical times in his various roles as:
  - a. Savior who pronounces forgiveness of sins and justifies by faith.
  - b. Sanctifier who cleanses a justified life on the way toward holiness and purity. Reflecting the legacy of Holiness movements, all Pentecostals affirm holiness in the Christian life.
  - c. Healer who delivers from illness, both physical and mental, and liberates from the power of evil spirits.
  - d. Baptizer with the Spirit who empowers Christians for witness and service by endowing with diverse spiritual gifts.
  - e. Soon-Coming King whose imminent return is a powerful catalyst for urgency in mission, proclamation, and service.

#### Pentecostals: Doctrine

20. Pentecostal identity is based upon charismatic spirituality rather than formally stated confessions, but that is not to say that doctrine plays no role in the movement. From their earliest days, Pentecostals have drafted various types of statements, reflecting on the meaning, significance, and implications of their experience and faith as they drew inspiration from their ecclesial traditions of origin. There was a need to test, judge, and discern whether proposed teachings were in keeping with the biblical witness and



- certain aspects of historical teaching.
21. Even when Pentecostals saw it necessary to give doctrinal form to their beliefs, particularly those that were distinctive—like Spirit baptism, glossolalia, healing, and other charisms—they remained suspicious of doctrinal or theological formulae, lest they become rigid and lifeless. Their apparent neglect of creeds and their arguments against their inclusion rarely had anything to do with the content. What worried Pentecostals was what they perceived as the lack of personal faith among believers in older traditions that retained the creeds. However, there is in principle nothing in Pentecostal doctrine that is not fully compatible with the creeds of the early church and its councils.
  22. In keeping with their practically- and biblically-oriented charismatic spirituality and ministry, most Pentecostal pastors and leaders to date have received little or no formal theological education and minimal ministerial training. A number of highly educated academic Pentecostal pastors and theologians is emerging and actively contributing to a growing body of serious Pentecostal theology.

### **Conclusion**

23. We have outlined some aspects of our two church families. The reader may have noticed that the respective ordering of the subsections that cover identity, experience, and doctrine is different. Lutherans usually begin with doctrine before speaking of experience, whereas as Pentecostals usually begin with experience before moving on to doctrine. However, despite this difference in framing, the content of our identities overlaps in many areas. Together we confess God the Holy Trinity. We believe in Jesus Christ, truly human and truly divine, who is our Savior and Lord. We hold that salvation is a purely gracious and free gift of God, and that sinners are justified by faith, which sets us free and sends us out into the world to serve. We interpret our experiences through holy Scripture and with the help of both the local and the global church. It is in the joyful recognition of these convergences in our Christian faith and practice that we can proceed to deeper exploration of the topics that follow.