

FELSISA and NELCOSA in ongoing dialogue

Work Document 2026

PART 1

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PREAMBLE

Dear sisters and brothers, dear reader,

Our churches – the Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa (FELSISA) and the Northeastern Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa (NELCSA) – have on several occasions in the past sought to engage with one another concerning our respective understandings of faith and practice. A particularly positive development in this ongoing journey has been the establishment of the Theological Working Group, which since 2018 has been addressing specific theological topics in a spirit of mutual respect and serious engagement.

While both churches gratefully acknowledge the fruitful work of this group and recognise the need for a patient, long-term process to foster genuine theological dialogue, the leadership of FELSISA and NELCSA met during 2024 and 2025 and recognised the need for a faster process to communicate with our members. On the one hand, there was a growing desire to respond to members within both churches who have been asking why these two Lutheran church bodies exist side by side in South Africa. On the other hand, it was deemed important not to place undue pressure on the Theological Working Group to hasten a process that rightly requires time, care, and sustained commitment.

Out of these considerations arose the initiative to identify and prepare a series of short, one-page statements on selected topics identified by the leadership of both churches. A broad range of themes was identified by both churches as important for further engagement. These are: Church affiliation and ecumenical engagement; Church offices and ordination; Holy Communion; Understanding of Scripture; Lutheran Confessional writings; Royal Priesthood / Priesthood of all believers; Baptism; the Role of Man and Woman; Law and Gospel; Church Discipline; Confession and Absolution; the Understanding of Faith; Ecclesiology (What is Church?); Church History; Liturgical Considerations; Original Sin; Marriage; Sexuality; and Church Governance.

Following this, a short list was prepared and a drafting team, consisting of evenly weighted pastors and laity from each church prepared the documents, which were then presented for adoption to joint meetings of the two church councils. In the interest of timely communication and release, it was decided that a first document would be produced addressing these short-listed topics, and that further documents would follow at a later stage. The first group of topics is presented in this document: FELSISA and NELCSA in ongoing dialogue.

These brief statements are intended to offer a concise summary or overview of each church's theological understanding, without claiming to answer every question or address every issue. They are seen as supplementing and complementing

the work done by the Theological Working Group and are by no means intended to replace it. The Theological Working Group is encouraged to continue preparing comprehensive texts that will engage these and other topics in greater depth.

The aim of the current statements is to present the theological viewpoints and practices of each church as formulated by the drafting teams from within that church. The statements are intended as a means of fostering mutual understanding and transparent communication. They are adopted by the Synodal Council of FELSISA and the Church Council of NELCSA and have not been submitted to, nor formally adopted by, either synod. They describe each church's theological positions and practices, demonstrating areas of commonality and difference between our churches, in a spirit of respect, openness, and Christian love. The intention is to express these perspectives in a way that is accessible and meaningful to all members of our congregations, including those without formal theological training, as well as to other interested readers outside of both churches who wish to gain insight into our respective theological positions and practices.

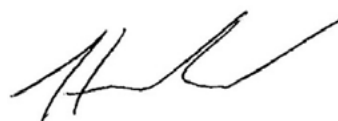
The topics presented here constitute part one of this process as a work document, with the intention of publishing a final comprehensive document upon completion of this broader engagement.

Ultimately, the goal of this initiative is to inform and deepen mutual understanding among the members of both churches – not to judge the other Church. Through this open exchange, we seek to strengthen the relationship between our churches, to foster honesty and trust, and to cultivate a conversation marked by attentive listening and mutual respect.

We encourage members of our congregations to make use of these documents and to enter into discussion with their spiritual leaders and with one another for greater understanding. The Church Leaderships welcome feedback in the form of verbal or written communication.

The Synodal Council of FELSISA and the Church Council of NELCSA formally accepted this document on 27 February 2026.

In Christ



Bishop Helmut Paul
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UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE (THE BIBLE)

FELSISA's understanding of Scripture is rooted in the firm conviction that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God, as Paul writes in 2 Tim. 3:16, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." This divine inspiration means that the entire Scripture – both the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments - comes from God Himself and serves as the foundation for faith and life. Likewise, Peter writes in 2 Pet. 1:19-21 that "no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation," but rather, "men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." These verses emphasise that Scripture is not a human invention or product but the result of the Holy Spirit's direct work.

The main subject of Holy Scriptures is Jesus Christ, and the life that comes through Him. The Holy Scriptures are the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the wide and narrow sense. Jesus Himself is the living Word of God, and this living Word comes to us in written form through the Scriptures. For this reason, the FELSISA rejects any attempt to separate the living Word from the written Word. While we distinguish between the two, they are not separated. We know and receive Christ, the living Word, only through the written word of Holy Scriptures. As John clearly confesses in his gospel, "these things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (Jn. 20:31). Therefore, with the Book of Concord, we confess the Holy Scriptures to be the pure (*rein*), clear (*lauter*) fountain of Israel.ⁱ One thread runs through all of Scripture – Jesus Christ and Him crucified (Jn. 5:39; Lk. 24:44-48; Acts 8:35). The Word of the Cross sheds its light on the entire Bible, especially through the right distinction of Law and Gospel – God's righteous judgment against sin and His gracious gift of salvation in Christ. This is revealed as the main mission of God with humankind stretching throughout all generations and contexts (Jews and Gentiles). As Paul confesses clearly in Rom. 1:16-18, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the *righteousness of God* is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.' For the *wrath of God* is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." We therefore reject any Gospel reductionism which mutes the Law of God.

We teach and confess that the Word of God not only speaks but also accomplishes what it declares. It is not simply information, but the living and active power of God (Heb. 4:12-13). This effective action of the Word is the foundation of faith, of the Sacraments, and of the Office of the Keys. Through the Word, the Holy Spirit Himself works, creating and sustaining faith.

Flowing forth from being the *pure* and *clear* Word of God, we also believe, teach and confess that the Holy Scriptures are the only true *standard* or *norm*, and the sole *guide* of faith, doctrine, and life, against which all teachers and teachings should be judgedⁱⁱ. A "guide" in common parlance today may be taken to mean an indicator that is not binding but rather more advisory in nature. Here however in the Book of Concord the word "guide" is used to refer to a rule ("*regula*" in Latin), that is, as a normative norm, against which all faiths, teachers and teachings, and life practices (ethics) are to be judged. The whole Bible is the infallible and unchanging Word of the Triune God inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, we reject any notion that the Holy Scriptures are dark, unclear, or insufficient as the sole source and guide for the Church, the Body of Christ, in every time, place and context. We also reject the claim that reason, human sciences or philosophies stand alongside Holy Scriptures as equal sources of truth for the Church. Reason, science, and philosophy are received as gifts of God and used ministerially – that is, in service to Holy Scriptures – but never magisterially, never sitting in judgment over the Word, which alone remains the inspired and norming norm (*norma normans*) of doctrine and interpretation. They can never override, contradict, nor disprove the Holy Scriptures – neither in part nor as a whole. Similarly, culture should conform to the Word of God, and not the Word of God to culture.

ⁱ SD, Summary, Rule, and Norm, 3, p 508.

ⁱⁱ Ep, Summary, 3, p 473.

UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE (THE BIBLE)

God reveals Himself to human beings through His Word. In His Word, God shows us His intention – His plan and purpose.ⁱ Through His Word, God actively works to bring about His intention. This Word of God is revealed to us through the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testament. Though all Scripture is written by human beings, it is God-breathed.ⁱⁱ God's Spirit breathes in and through Scripture enabling the written words of human beings to confront us with the living God, where and as the Spirit works. That means God's Spirit works through these human words so that we can meet the living God. This is what we mean when we say the Bible is inspired by God; it is not meant in the sense that every word, punctuation mark and sentence was dictated word-for-word by the Holy Spirit (verbal inspiration). The NELCSA views the Bible as reliable and truthful.

We distinguish between three expressions of God's Word.ⁱⁱⁱ

- **God's incarnate Word** (God's Word in human form) is Jesus Christ. In Him God reveals Himself and His intention clearly and God's grace, love and redemption are granted through the life, death and resurrection of Christ alone.
- **God's written Word** is the Bible. The Holy Scriptures – in the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament – show us our need of redemption and point us to God's gift of salvation in Christ.
- **God's proclaimed Word** is wherever God's Word is communicated through Word and Sacrament.

Since Holy Scripture reveals God's Word and God's Word reveals God's intention, Holy Scripture is the only norm and guide for faith, doctrine and human existence.^{iv} It is the authority on which the Church bases and against which the Church measures its faith, doctrine and proclamation. Whenever God's Word is *proclaimed* through Word and Sacrament, **it has to be based on the witness of the written Word** (i.e. the Scriptures), which ultimately leads us to Christ as *incarnate Word*.^v

It is therefore our responsibility to continuously strive to recognise how Scripture is to be rightly understood. Since Scripture must be read by people, interpretation is always involved. The Bible can be misunderstood, misused, even rejected. In our striving to recognise how Scripture is to be rightly understood, decisions must be made regarding its interpretation. That is why it is important for us to have a responsible hermeneutical framework – a framework that guides us through our interpretation. Here are some of the principles that we use:

- What promotes Christ ("*Was Christum treibet*") – Jesus Christ is the centre of Scripture and the lens through which we read Scripture.

- Is the text Law or Gospel? In his Word, God addresses us in these two different ways: Law (showing us God's will and our failure) and Gospel (showing us God's saving Grace).^{vi}
- Is the text to be understood literally or not?
- What kind of text is it (e.g. poetry, history, prophecy or another type)?
- What is the historical and literary context of the passage?
- How does the passage relate to the whole of Scripture? Scripture interprets Scripture. Clear passages should help us to interpret unclear passages.

This whole process of interpreting Scripture is done by humans, using human reasoning in human language. In this, human reason is an indispensable tool for the transmission and recognition of the revelation of the Word of God. This reason needs to be humbly and prayerfully subjected to the text and to the working of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is the living Word of God and is the Centre of Scripture. Since Christ is the centre of Scripture, Christ must be the lens through which we read Scripture (the hermeneutical key) – that which advances and promotes Christ, our Saviour, is truly God's Word.^{vii} The Gospel message of salvation by Grace alone is at the centre of how we view the entire body of Scripture. Our reading of Scripture must stand the test of whether it adheres to the Gospel of the justification of the godless sinner by the Grace of Christ alone. In doing so, such interpretation will distinguish Grace and Gospel from any attempts to use Law and the own efforts of humans as a path to salvation. Dealing with the Bible – as a whole – responsibly means that we ensure that our interpretation promotes this cause of Christ, which is the salvation of the sinner by the Grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

References (www.nelcsa.net)

- ⁱ NELCSA Position Paper "Understanding Scripture," Thesis 9
- ⁱⁱ 2 Timothy 3:16
- ⁱⁱⁱ NELCSA Position Paper "Understanding Scripture," Theses 13-15
- ^{iv} NELCSA Constitution, Basic Article states that "the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments" are "the sole guide of faith, doctrine and life."
- ^v NELCSA Position Paper "Understanding Scripture," Thesis 16
- ^{vi} NELCSA Position Paper "Understanding Scripture," Thesis 10; elaboration in a separate topic.
- ^{vii} NELCSA Position Paper "Understanding Scripture," Thesis 20; Guideline for Church Life in the NELCSA, §11.1

COMMITMENT TO THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

The FELSISA regards all the Lutheran Confessions contained in the Book of Concord (the three Ecumenical Symbols, namely the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed; the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and its Apology; the Smalcald Articles; the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope; the Small and the Large Catechisms of Dr Martin Luther; and the Formula of Concord) "as true and binding statement and exposition of the Holy Scriptures."ⁱ

The right relationship of the confessional writings to Holy Scriptures

The Holy Scriptures are the norm, while the confessional writings in the Book of Concord are the derived norm. These confessional statements are not on the same level as the Holy Scriptures.

In the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord it is clearly stated that the ancient creeds flow from Holy Scriptures, that the Augsburg Confession accords with both the Holy Scriptures and the ancient creeds and that the rest of the subsequent confessional writings and statements are all in harmony with one another and with the Augsburg Confession.ⁱⁱ The Book of Concord hence states, "The comprehensive summary, foundation, rule and norm by which all dogmas should be judged *according to God's Word*."ⁱⁱⁱ FELSISA confesses that Holy Scripture and the derived norm, the Book of Concord, stand in full agreement. For this reason, pastors at their ordination pledge to subscribe to the Book of Concord without reservation (*quia*), precisely because it is in complete accordance with Holy Scriptures.

The dual character of the Book of Concord: Affirming what unites and rejecting what divides

The Solid Declaration (SD) of the Formula of Concord states:

"It is not only necessary that the pure, wholesome doctrine be rightly presented for the preservation of pure doctrine and for thorough, permanent, godly unity in the Church, but it is also necessary that the opponents who teach otherwise be reprov'd (1 Timothy 3; [2 Timothy 3:16;] Titus 1:9). Faithful shepherds, as Luther says, should do both things: (a) feed or nourish the lambs and (b) resist the wolves. Then the sheep may flee from strange voices (John 10:5-12) and may separate the precious from the worthless (Jeremiah 15:19).

Regarding these matters, we have thoroughly and clearly told one another the following: a distinction should and must by all means be kept between (a) unnecessary and useless wrangling (the Church should not allow itself to be disturbed by this, since it destroys more than it builds up) and (b) when the kind of controversy arises that involves the articles of faith or the chief points of Christian doctrine. Then the false, opposite doctrine must be reprov'd for the defence of the truth."^{iv}

"This means we state the true doctrine and the opposite doctrine, in order that the foundation of the divine truth might be clear in all articles."^v

The Confessions of the Book of Concord: More than contextual, traditional, or historical data

The Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord states:

"Therefore, we have clearly and directly declared ourselves to one another on the chief and most important articles taken one by one. At the present time these articles have come into controversy so that there might be a public, definite testimony, not only for those now living, but also for our descendants. We make known what is and should remain the unanimous understanding and judgment of our churches in reference to the articles in controversy."^{vi}

The FELSISA therefore subscribes fully to the confessional writings contained in the Book of Concord: on the one hand, to set forth pure and wholesome doctrine, and on the other, to refute false and contrary teachings. In this way, the "simple, unchangeable, permanent truth"^{vii} is confessed against all distortions. The confessions guide the Church to repentance and a return to the pure and sound teachings of Holy Scriptures – reform understood as a return to the source, not as progress that departs from it.

ⁱ FELSISA Constitution (2025), § 1.1.1.3.

ⁱⁱ SD, Summary, Rule, and Norm, 4-8, p 508.

ⁱⁱⁱ SD, Summary, Rule, and Norm, 1, p 506 (emphasis added).

^{iv} SD, Summary, Rule, and Norm, 14, p 510.

^v Ibid. SD, 19, p 510.

^{vi} Ibid. SD, 16, p 510.

^{vii} Ibid. SD, 20, p 510.

COMMITMENT TO THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

This statement outlines NELCSA's approach to the Lutheran confessional writings. It does not focus in specific detail on the content of the confessional writings but explains what role they play in the theology, laws and church life of NELCSA.

The Basic Article of the NELCSA Constitution states: "*The Northeastern Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa is based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the sole guide of faith, doctrine and life.*" Since our primary confession is the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, we believe that the Lutheran confessional writings do not stand above or beside Scripture but faithfully witness to the truth of the Gospel. As a second emphasis in the Basic Article, we state the following about the Lutheran Confessions: "*As regards doctrine and life it subscribes to the Evangelical Lutheran Confessions, as set out in all the confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, especially the Augsburg Confession of 1530 and the Small Catechism of Dr Martin Luther.*"

By "*all the confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*", we mean the writings included in the Book of Concord, which consists of the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian creedsⁱ, Augsburg Confession, Defense of the Augsburg Confession, Smalcald Articles, Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, Luther's Small and Large Catechisms, and the Formula of Concord. The Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism are emphasised in the Basic Article for historical reasons.

The NELCSA Constitution also declares the following:

- The regulations which govern the employment of co-workers who are to be blessed or inducted, must include a declaration of commitment to the Confessions.ⁱⁱ
- The church laws of NELCSA are clear that voluntary co-workers who fill the various offices in congregations and the church, must also commit themselves to the Confessions when they are inducted.ⁱⁱⁱ
- A congregation regulates its own affairs and fulfils its task independently, bound by Scripture and Confession and subject to the Constitution of the NELCSA and other Church legislation.^{iv}
- The duties of the Bishop include ensuring that the Word of God is preached according to the Gospel and in accordance with the Lutheran Confessions and that the Sacraments are properly administered.^v
- In its consideration of questions of the life and doctrine of the church, the Ecclesiastical Council (i.e. Bishop, Deputy Bishop and Deans) is to consider the Confessions.^{vi}

According to the Law on Pastors, pastors of NELCSA are bound by their ordination to teach the Gospel, in its purity as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and testified to in the Confessions.^{vii} Applicants to pastor's post, who come from other churches, are required to subscribe to the Confessions.^{viii} Should there be a violation of doctrine, disciplinary steps may be taken.^{ix}

The Guideline for Church Life is based on the Confessions^x.

Though we commit ourselves to the confessional writings, these writings themselves must continuously be measured against the Scriptures. The Confessions are not to be viewed as equal to Scripture, but subject to it. Just as we must reflect on our own confessing to see whether it is in line with Scripture, so we must reflect on our confessional writings to see whether they are in line with Scripture. The confessional writings themselves say this: "*Other writings [meaning all writings other than Scripture]...whatever name they bear, must not be regarded as equal to the Holy Scriptures, but all of them together be subjected to them, and should not be received otherwise or further than as witnesses.*"^{xi} These other writings – including the confessional writings themselves – "*are not judges, as are the Holy Scriptures, but only a testimony and declaration of faith, as to how at a specific time, the Holy Scriptures have been understood and explained.*"^{xii} On this basis, we as a church are convinced that we too, in our time, are to confess how the Holy Scriptures are understood and explained. In this confessing, we are guided by the confessional writings but must also subject them to scrutiny of Scripture.

This is what we mean when, for example, we include the following sentence in the oath of ordination: "*The ordained has, before God and the congregation, committed to service according to the Word of God, as it is given in Holy Scripture and testified in the confessional writings, and, within in this bond to be ready to ever new confessing.*"^{xiii}

ⁱ We include the confession of a Creed in our Worship Services, usually the Apostles' Creed on normal Sundays and the Nicene Creed at Church Festivals (e.g. Easter, Pentecost and Christmas)

ⁱⁱ NELCSA Constitution, Section 15

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, Congregational Councillors – NELCSA Congregational Code, Sections 25, 27 and 45

^{iv} NELCSA Constitution, Section 18 (1)

^v NELCSA Constitution, Section 44 (1) (a)

^{vi} NELCSA Constitution, Section 68 (1)

^{vii} NELCSA Law on Pastors, Section 3 (1)

^{viii} NELCSA Law on Pastors, Section 6

^{ix} NELCSA Law on Pastors, Sections 26 and 28

^x Guideline for Church Life in the NELCSA, p 2

^{xi} The Epitome of the Formula of Concord (1)

^{xii} The Epitome of the Formula of Concord (3)

^{xiii} Der Ordinierte hat sich vor Gott und der Gemeinde verpflichtet, seinen Dienst gemäß dem Wort Gottes, wie es in der Heiligen Schrift gegeben und in den Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche bezeugt ist, wahrzunehmen und in dieser Bindung zu immer neuem Bekennen bereit zu sein.

HOLY COMMUNION

The FELSISA states in its Life Norms and Values:

“The Lord Jesus instituted Holy Communion and instructed his Church to celebrate it. In communion we receive the true body and blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in, with and under the blessed bread and wine (1 Cor. 11:23-26; Matt. 26:26-29; par). Through this mystery, which reason cannot comprehend, we receive forgiveness of sin, life and salvation. It is a comfort to all who are troubled in their faith, that this miracle does not depend on the faith of the pastor or of members of the congregation. Holy Communion does not depend on our faith for its effectivity, but on the promise of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.”ⁱ

To this the Formula of Concord states:

“Jesus Christ’s true and almighty words, which He spoke at the first institution, were effective not only at the first Supper. They endure, are valid, operate, and are still effective. So in all places where the Supper is celebrated according to Christ’s institution and His words are used, Christ’s body and blood are truly present, distributed, and received.”ⁱⁱ

The FELSISA confesses that in Holy Communion we therefore truly receive Christ’s body and blood with our mouths, in, with, and under the bread and wine. This true presence does not rest on human reason or faith but solely on the Word and command of Christ. Therefore, we reject the teaching that the Sacrament is merely a symbol or figurative sign of Christ’s body and blood. Such teaching denies the real presence of Christ in the Supper and twists His words into their opposite. We do not only confess that Christ is present – since He is indeed present wherever two or three are gathered in His name (Matt. 18:20) – but that He is truly and bodily present in the bread and wine. Furthermore, we confess that the Lord’s Supper is a means of grace, through which Christ bestows forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation upon those who believe His Word of promise: “*given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.*” Faith in these words is necessary for worthy participation, to receive the Sacrament without faith brings judgment rather than blessing.ⁱⁱⁱ Thus, a worthy manner includes a process of “examination” (1 Cor. 11:28). Worthy or worthily is not referring to the deeds or the feelings of joy or sorrow of a person, but a heart that truly believes and trust in Christ’s words in Holy Communion (1 Cor. 11:27-29).

In the FELSISA Holy Communion is administered by called and ordained pastors,^{iv} who as stewards of God’s mysteries (1 Cor. 4:1) consecrate the elements, provide instruction on the Sacrament’s blessing, and exercise pastoral care in its distribution. Persons elected by the congregation (as a rule members of the church council) and vicars may assist the pastor in the distribution of Holy Communion.

Participation in Holy Communion

The FELSISA understands that church fellowship at the Lord’s Supper is given with those who confess and teach the same, thus with “members of churches which are in fellowship with FELSISA”, and that “Lutheran Christians commune in congregations with whom fellowship has been declared.”^v It therefore practices “closed” communion, while making allowance for guests who are members of churches with which no fellowship has been declared to take part in communion in exceptional cases of pastoral care.

The FELSISA rejects the so-called “open” communion practice, which permits members of different Christian denominations – holding differing confessions of faith – to commune together. These confessions of faith, especially regarding the Lord’s Supper, are often mutually contradictory. The Book of Concord identifies many such false teachings, which the FELSISA rejects in accordance with the Lutheran Confessions.^{vi} Such errors distort the truth of the Sacrament, namely, that we receive with our mouths the true body and blood of Christ, in faith, for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of faith.

ⁱ Live Norms and Values of the FELSISA (2025), §5.5.

ⁱⁱ SD VII, 75, p. 574.

ⁱⁱⁱ SC, VI, “Who, then, receives such Sacrament worthily? Answer: Fasting and bodily preparation are, indeed, fine outward training. But a person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words, ‘Given... and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.’ But anyone who does not believe these words, or doubts, is unworthy and unfit.”, p. 343.

^{iv} AC XIV, p. 39.

^v Life Norms and Values of the FELSISA (2025), § 5.5.9.

^{vi} SD VII, 107–128, p. 579-581.

HOLY COMMUNION

Holy Communionⁱ is one of the two sacraments – Baptism and Holy Communion – recognised by NELCSA. As such it is God’s Word made visible and is a means of grace. Christ grants us himself in Holy Communion. Just as it is with God’s Word, the sacraments also expect a response from us, namely faith.

What Holy Communion is and means

- In Holy Communion, we receive – by the promise of God – forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.
- Jesus himself invites to Holy Communion. It is not people who create unity – with the risen Lord and with each other – at the Lord’s Table, but Christ himself who unites, strengthens and maintains us as the many members of his body.
- Jesus himself is truly present in Holy Communion - we confess the real presence of the crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ, in Holy Communion: *“It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself.”*ⁱⁱ
- Holy Communion is also a meal of remembrance. What Jesus did to save us in the past becomes real and effective for us here and now.
- Holy Communion asks for a response from us: submission, discipleship (following Him) and engaging with Him and with our fellow human beings – in short, faith.
- Holy Communion is fellowship and a celebration of the one body of Christ – it is the sacrament of unity. This unity is based on Christ Himself.ⁱⁱⁱ

Who may administer Holy Communion?

According to the Augsburg Confession (art 14), *“Nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular (proper) call”*. In NELCSA there are two ways in which this regular call can be received, both after a carefully defined level of teaching and preparation:

- Ordination – ordained pastors of NELCSA have the right and duty to administer Holy Communion.
- Appointment of lay administrators – such administrators can be appointed by Church Council after completing a training course.^{iv}
- The pastor or lay administrator may be assisted in the distribution of Holy Communion.

Who may participate at Holy Communion?

In terms of participation at Holy Communion, we believe and practice the following:

- We are not in ourselves worthy to participate in Holy Communion. If we think we have to be a “good person” to participate, then we have misunderstood the term “unworthy” used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:27. We are *“truly worthy and well prepared”* if we have *“faith in these words, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”*^v
- Since Holy Communion is the feast of those called by Jesus into His fellowship, and this calling by Jesus into His fellowship is expressed in Baptism, then Baptism is imperative for participation in Holy Communion.
- We practice a so-called open Communion: if baptised members of other Christian denominations, who are baptised and share the belief in Christ’s real presence, desire to take part in our celebration of Holy Communion they are cordially invited to do so as guests. Similarly, members of our Church are free to be guests at the celebration of other Christian denominations, if they are invited.
- Since baptised children are, undoubtedly, part of the body of Christ, and can trust in the real presence of Christ and the words *“given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,”* children may participate in Holy Communion after prior instruction and with the consent of their parents/caregivers.^{vi}

References (www.nelcsa.net)

ⁱ Summary of the statement on Holy Communion published by the Theological Study Commission (1997). Where changes were subsequently approved by Synod, these are referenced below.

ⁱⁱ Martin Luther, Small Catechism, What is the Sacrament of the Altar?

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Cor 10:17

^{iv} Congregational Code, Section 57 A

^v Martin Luther, Small Catechism, Who receives this sacrament worthily?

^{vi} Guidelines for Church Life, 3.6 The Practice of Holy Communion

ORDINATION AND CHURCH OFFICES

The FELSISA differentiates between the Office of the Holy Ministry, which was instituted by Jesus Christ and may only be performed by an ordained pastor, and other offices in the congregation which all members may perform due to the priesthood of all believers. It states in the constitution: “The pastoral office instituted by Jesus Christ for the public testimony of God’s Word and the stewardship of the sacraments may only be practised by those who are rightfully called and ordained. This ministry can only be assigned to men.”ⁱ The FELSISA ordains only examined and rightfully called men into the Office of the Holy Ministry. To them alone is entrusted the responsibility of preaching God’s Word and administering the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

The FELSISA holds that the Office of the Holy Ministry is divinely instituted and not merely a human arrangement for the sake of good order (Matt. 28:19-20; John 20:21-23; Rom. 10:14-17) and rejects the ideas and teachings that the Office of the Holy Ministry is dispensable. We also reject that both man and woman may be ordained (cf. 1 Tim. 2:12-14; 3:1-2; 1 Cor. 14:33-38; Ti. 1:6). We strongly affirm that the Office of the Holy Ministry is not an office of worldly power or domination over God’s people, but a divinely instituted office of service (cf. Mk. 10:42-45; 2 Cor. 4:5; 1 Pet. 5:2-3; 1 Cor. 3:5). In this Office the pastor exercises the authority of Christ’s Word by faithfully preaching the Gospel, administering the Sacraments, and assuming loving responsibility for the pastoral care of the flock entrusted to him.ⁱⁱ

Pastors of the FELSISA are obligated to confess and teach the pure Word of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures – the apostolic and prophetic writings with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone. They are also bound to subscribe unconditionally to the Book of Concord as the true and faithful exposition of the Scriptures. Their teaching and life are to be exemplary, shaped and governed by this Word of God.

Accordingly, pastors in the FELSISA are commissioned to preach God’s Word and administer the Sacraments publicly, conduct divine services, perform ecclesiastical functions, provide religious instruction, minister to youth, and offer pastoral care to all members of the congregation. They are to foster cooperation, mission commitment, charitable engagement, and faithful stewardship within the congregation, while conscientiously maintaining congregational records and participating in synodical conventions and pastoral conferences. They are bound to absolute and lifelong pastoral confidentiality, even beyond the termination of their services, and must exercise great care regarding any disclosure entrusted to him.

The Constitution of the FELSISA furthermore states:

“In addition to the pastoral office, which is instituted by Christ, the Church has since the time of the apostles in Christian freedom established other offices in order to fulfil the manifold duties of the Christian congregation.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The mandate of the Church to make disciples of all nations applies to all members of the Church. They participate in this calling according to the gifts God has given them (cf. the Priesthood of All Believers). In a particular way this mandate is carried out through the Office of the Holy Ministry, to which certain responsibilities for preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments have been entrusted.

In order to assist in the life and work of the congregation, a number of additional offices and responsibilities are established. Among these are the church councillors, who serve as assistants to the pastor with specific responsibilities, supporting him and helping to guide the congregation in its spiritual life and duties. They also act as trustees of the congregational property.

ⁱ FELSISA Constitution (2025), §1.2.1.3.

ⁱⁱ Service Contract of Pastors in the FELSISA, §3 Service Description.

ⁱⁱⁱ FELSISA Constitution (2025), §1.2.1.4

ORDINATION AND CHURCH OFFICES

Ordination is a public act by which NELCSA affirms and commissions an individual to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. It includes the laying on of hands, prayer, and vows to preach the Gospel, administer the Sacraments, and provide pastoral care in accountability to Scripture, the Confessions, and the relevant Church law. This office is not a private privilege, but a ministry exercised publicly on behalf of the Church.

According to Lutheran theology, the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9) means that all those who are baptised are called to serve God – in witness, prayer, love, and faithful living in their vocations. Within this universal calling, specific offices are established for good order, public witness, and accountability.

In NELCSA, pastors are ordained and called to preach, teach, baptise, preside at the Lord’s Supper (Holy Communion), and care for the congregation. According to the Guideline for Church Life, this ministry is exercised not for personal status but on behalf of the whole Church.ⁱ The Congregational Code adds that the pastor “*bears the professional responsibility of service in Word and Sacrament*”.ⁱⁱ

At ordination, pastors promise before God and the congregation to:

- proclaim the Gospel as given in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions,
- administer the Sacraments according to Christ’s institution,
- guard the confidentiality of confession,
- live in Christ’s discipleship, and
- dedicate their strength to their office in obedience to the Constitution and laws of the Church they serve in.

On this basis, pastors are entrusted with the public preaching of the Word and administration of the Sacraments.ⁱⁱⁱ NELCSA ordains both men and women and recognises them equally as ministers of Word and Sacrament.

At the request of a congregation, trained lay people may also be authorised to preach and administer Holy Communion, reflecting both the freedom and structure of the Church.^{iv} In addition, NELCSA recognises a variety of ministries supporting congregational life: lay preachers, lay readers, youth leaders, teachers, musicians, worship assistants, diaconal workers, etc. The Congregational Code regulates their training, appointment, and terms of service. Lay preachers and lay administrators of Holy Communion are appointed for four years (renewable).^v

Voluntary service is highly valued, with all members encouraged to use their gifts to build the Body of Christ.^{vi} Full-time and part-time co-workers may also be employed for education, administrative tasks, mission, welfare,^{vii} etc.

Governance and oversight in congregations are exercised through Congregational Councils and General Meetings. Council members are inducted in a worship service. They pledge to serve according to NELCSA doctrine and law.^{viii} Leadership is shared between pastor and Congregational Council, with meetings usually chaired by a lay (i.e. non-ordained) person.

On a wider level, Synod, together with the Bishop and Church Council, carry responsibility for doctrine, ministry, and overall church life.^{ix} Synod embodies both the unity and diversity of NELCSA and is chaired by a non-ordained person, the President of Synod. The laity form a clear majority within Synod, ensuring that the voice of congregational members is strongly represented.

References (www.nelcsa.net)

- i Guideline for Church Life in the NELCSA, §§9.2 and 9.5
- ii Congregational Code, Section 48
- iii Ordination Formula of NELCSA (Ordination vows, NELCSA)
- iv NELCSA Constitution, Chapter 3, Section 10(2)
- v Congregational Code, Sections 56–57
- vi Congregational Code, Section 53
- vii NELCSA Constitution, Sections 11–12
- viii Congregational Code, Section 24
- ix NELCSA Constitution, Chapter 6, Section 31.

PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS (ROYAL PRIESTHOOD)

Holy Scripture describes Christians as: “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9). Through the saving work of Jesus Christ, all baptised believers have access to God, freedom from condemnation, and the privilege of interceding for others. The FELSISA strongly affirms this truth.

Central to the understanding of this royal priesthood is the confession that Christ alone is our great High Priest (Heb. 4:14-16). He offered Himself as the once-for-all sacrifice for sins and continually intercedes for His Church. In Him, baptised Christians share a new standing before God. They have direct access to the Father and offer spiritual sacrifices of thanksgiving, prayer, and praise. They proclaim the Gospel informally and serve their neighbours in love.

The priesthood of all believers is an identity and a calling lived out in everyday vocations. Whether as parents, workers, students, members of a congregation or citizens, Christians exercise their royal priesthood whenever they love and serve those whom God has placed around them in their daily lives.

This understanding however does not imply that every Christian may assume the pastoral office. The Scriptures teach that alongside the priesthood of all believers, Christ has instituted a distinct public office for the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments (Matt. 28:19-20; Jn. 20:21; Lk. 10:16).ⁱ Paul speaks clearly of this when he describes overseers, pastors, and teachers (Eph. 4:11), when he gives qualifications for the office (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Ti. 1:1-9), and when he urges Timothy and Titus to appoint such men. The Lutheran Confessions summarise this biblical teaching in the Augsburg Confession: “No one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the Sacraments without a rightly ordered call.”ⁱⁱ This call exists for the good of the congregation, so that the Word is taught faithfully and the Sacraments are administered according to Christ’s command.

Furthermore, the pastoral office does not stand over or against the priesthood of believers, nor does it exist because pastors possess more holiness or spiritual status. Rather, it is established by Christ for the public ministry of Word and Sacrament. Pastors serve by nourishing and strengthening the royal priesthood through preaching, teaching, absolving, baptising, and administering the Lord’s Supper. They act publicly on behalf of the congregation so that Christ’s gifts are delivered with certainty, order, and clarity.

At the same time, the royal priesthood has its own proper place. Believers are called to witness to Christ in the home and workplace, to forgive one another, to pray for the Church and the world, and to serve their neighbour in love. These activities reflect the priestly life to which every Christian is called. Luther often praised such service, seeing holy living not in withdrawal from the world but in faithful love within one’s vocation. Even in extraordinary situations – such as emergency baptism – where any Christian may act, this is not an assumption of the pastoral office, but an expression of neighbourly care when the normal order is temporarily unavailable.ⁱⁱⁱ

The FELSISA’s understanding of the royal priesthood therefore affirms two complementary truths: the full equality of all Christians before God and the divinely instituted order of the public ministry. Neither diminishes the other. In this way, the Church lives not in competition between laity and clergy, but in harmony. Each member, each vocation, and each office serves the other. Together, pastors and people declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light, living as His royal priesthood in the world.

In the Life Norms and Values of the FELSISA’s Constitution it is accordingly stated:

“To the ministry, which was instituted by Jesus Christ, and which may only be performed by an ordained pastor, a number of further offices in the congregation have been added in accordance with their constitution to perform the multiple duties of the congregation. These offices have their origins in the universal priesthood of all believers. The service in these offices require the readiness to be an aide and co-worker for the Pastor and thereby to serve and promote the gospel-conforming life of the congregation and church. All offices and services have the same aim, namely that Gods Word should attain faith, awaken love and strengthen the congregation. With the discharge of these duties care must be taken not to perform duties which characteristically are functions of the public ministry, or which could be confused with them.”^{iv}

ⁱ AC XXVIII, 5-6; Tr 10, p. 295; Tr 31, p. 298.

ⁱⁱ AC, XIV, p. 39.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tr 67, p. 304.

^{iv} Life Norms and Values of the FELSISA (2025), § 5.7.

PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS (ROYAL PRIESTHOOD)

Jesus Christ sends His Church – all baptised Christians – into the world with the responsibility to proclaim the Word of God, administer the Sacraments, and to be active in mission and the service of love (1 Matth. 28:18-20). In the New Testament, all Christians are members of the one “body of Christ.” Within the congregation of the baptised, all share equal spiritual status and are clothed with Christ. All are called to build up the Church with their different gifts.ⁱ The Priesthood of All Believers is grounded in Baptism. In 1 Peter 2:5+9, the baptised are called a “royal priesthood.” Through faith and prayer, they have free access to God. Their spiritual sacrifice is devotion to God, service to others, and care for the poor.

For Lutherans, the Priesthood of All Believers flows from justification by grace through faith. Jesus Christ, the true High Priest, reconciled humankind to God through His life, death, and resurrection. Salvation is God’s work. All baptised share in Christ’s priestly work and come before God with full access, dignity, and responsibility – called to intercede for others and preach the gospel of reconciliation. Martin Luther emphasised that all believers are saints and priests through faith. There is no distinction before God between clergy and laity – or between male and female – regarding salvation or spiritual status. Through Baptism, all share equal dignity and access to God. “Therefore, all Christians are priests; the men, priests, the women, priestesses, be they young or old, masters or servants, mistresses or maids, learned or unlearned. Here there is no difference, unless faith be unequal.”ⁱⁱ

For Luther, all baptised have been redeemed by Christ’s grace and can interpret the Word. They serve the Church and the world as “priests” and witness to the Gospel in their everyday life and occupation. Lutheran theology distinguishes between the universal priesthood and ordained ministry. The office of ministry is open to all Christians. At the same time the Confessio Augustana confirms that no one should publicly proclaim without a proper call.ⁱⁱⁱ For the sake of order, the Church needs to call, train, and ordain pastors to preach the Word of God and administer the sacraments publicly on behalf of all. All baptised participate in this calling by electing the office bearers and evaluating their teaching. Ordination does not confer a different status, but a particular responsibility for the sake of the Gospel.

NELCSA is committed to the Priesthood of All Believers.^{iv} Men and women are called, trained, and ordained as pastors to publicly proclaim the Word of God and administer the Sacraments. All congregation members elect a pastor. Church leadership is elected at synod with a two-thirds lay majority. Pastors hold the pulpit right and may invite people to preach – youth, Bible study participants, or pastors from other denominations. Our church encourages all members – male and female, young and old – to live out the Priesthood of All Believers in their congregations and proclaim the Gospel in word and action in the Church and in everyday life: from volunteers in the congregation to congregational council members. Lay preachers are trained and inducted for a specific task and term. They institute Holy Communion, pronounce absolution, and conduct memorial services. Training and support are provided to equip responsible lay leaders. Congregants lead confirmation classes, children’s church, and Bible studies; they do counselling, visit the sick, do Scripture readings during services, and assist with the distribution of Holy Communion.

Ultimately, the Lutheran commitment to the Priesthood of All Believers safeguards the freedom of the Gospel and affirms the dignity of every baptised believer, empowering the whole Church to live as a community of faith, prayer, witness, and service in our communities and country.

ⁱ 1 Cor. 10:16; 12:27; 14:12; Eph. 4:11f., 12, 15f.; Col. 1:18; 1 Pet. 4:10

ⁱⁱ Treatise on the New Testament that is the Holy Mass (1520)

ⁱⁱⁱ The Book of Concord (Tappert 1959) CA V page 31 and CA XIV page 36

^{iv} NELCSA website: <https://www.nelcsa.net> – Our Purpose: Objectives and Goals

GLOBAL AND ECUMENICAL CHURCH RELATIONS

Church fellowship and global engagement

In the Life Norms and Values of the FELSISA Synodical Constitution it is stated:

“The proper relationship between the FELSISA and other church bodies is governed by the fundamental articles of the FELSISA (cf. §1.1 of the Synodical Constitution) and falls under the sphere of church fellowship. Church fellowship between the FELSISA and another church body is declared by the synodical convention (cf. also §1.7.2.5.7) once it has been recognised that agreement of doctrine and practice exists between two church bodies in conformity with Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions as an obligatory exposition of Holy Scripture. Church fellowship is expressed by the mutual admission of members of both church bodies to Holy Communion and by reciprocal altar and pulpit service of pastors.”ⁱ

In accordance with the above, the FELSISA has entered into church fellowship with various confessional Lutheran church bodies in Africa and worldwide. Altar and pulpit fellowship has been declared with these churches following formal discussions between church leaders and recognition by the synodical convention. Furthermore, the FELSISA is also a member of the International Lutheran Council (ILC).ⁱⁱ

The FELSISA regards gatherings, meetings, and partnerships with partner churches or member churches of the ILC as vital, recognising both their formative character and the value of being a member or in full fellowship. The member churches of the ILC are considered as being supportive and influential in matters of confession and collaboration, as well as in providing resources. They often serve as platforms for pastoral formation, and pastors are received from, or sent or released to, partner churches within these organisations.ⁱⁱⁱ

Ecumenical responsibility

In the Life Norms and Values of the FELSISA Synodical Constitution it is stated:

“The FELSISA takes seriously what it confesses in the Apostles’ Creed: ‘I believe in the one, holy, Christian, apostolic church.’ Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions recognise that this church consists of people scattered around the world who adhere to the true gospel and thus to Christ but may belong to church bodies not in church fellowship with the FELSISA. This holds true because it is possible for the Holy Spirit to convert the hearts of human beings through the means of Word and Sacrament where and when He pleases. The Lutheran Confessions certainly reject and condemn false doctrine, but their stated aim is to refrain from condemning entire churches or

individual persons. The FELSISA refrains from doing so as well.^{iv} By the same token, it is very well possible for there to be hypocrites within the FELSISA, even though the synod is convinced that the doctrines it preaches and teaches are Scriptural and right because they stand on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

Given that there exists one, holy, Christian (universal), apostolic Church all over the world, and given that Christ has sent his Church into all the world to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19), to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15), and to show love toward our neighbour without respect of geographical boundaries, the FELSISA has an ecumenical (i.e. worldwide) responsibility. This responsibility may be defined as follows: It is *firstly* to preach and teach the gospel and administer the Sacraments without reservation in divine services that are open to the public and to which all are welcome; it is *secondly* to say yes to truth and no to falsehood; it is *thirdly* to pray for all people and for all in authority (1 Tim 2:1-3) [...]; it is *fourthly* to support by all means the propagation of the gospel by way of Lutheran mission; it is *fifthly* to deploy qualified theologians to engage in doctrinal discussions with other church bodies; it is *sixthly* to show love to the neighbour by way of works of mercy both within and beyond the synod and congregation; and it is *seventhly* to make a bold confession to the world in matters of Christian ethics. In this way, the confession of the church is directed toward the world.

Where no church fellowship has been declared, it is possible to carry out this responsibility in cooperation with other church bodies and individual Christians. In so doing, the intent is to seek for and harness commonalities that exist beyond the boundaries of church fellowship, so as to give joint witness as Christians to the world in the sense of Jn 17. Examples include (but are not limited to) establishing schools, care centres, or old age homes; supporting fundraisers in aid of mercy work; or participating in peaceful, public marches or initiatives for the right to life and against abortion, assisted suicide, and euthanasia. In general, Christians from other church bodies are to be shown respect. They are to be met with an eagerness to listen, to find commonalities, and to speak the truth in love.”^v

ⁱ FELSISA Constitution (2025), § 5.1.7.

ⁱⁱ <https://ilcouncil.org/> (accessed 24/9/2025)

ⁱⁱⁱ For an insight into the work of the ILC cf. the homepage, <https://ilcouncil.org/> (accessed 24/9/2025).

^{iv} While the practice of not admitting to the Lord’s Supper those who belong to a church body not in fellowship with the FELSISA may be perceived as judgmental or condemning, no such judgment or condemning is implied or intended.

^v FELSISA Constitution (2025), § 5.1.7.

GLOBAL AND ECUMENICAL CHURCH RELATIONS

As NELCSA, we live in the creative tension of being both deeply rooted in our own confession of faith and actively open to dialogue and cooperation with other Christian traditions. These three realities – church affiliation, global partnerships, and ecumenical engagement – are closely related but must be distinguished to faithfully carry out our calling.

Church affiliation

Church affiliation refers in the first instance to the concrete belonging of our members and congregations to NELCSA. Through baptism, confirmation, and membership, individuals are incorporated into our church's life, participating in its worship, sacraments, and structures. This expresses our identity and accountability as a Lutheran church, committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as witnessed in the Scriptures and confessed in the Lutheran Confessions.

Affiliation also formally connects us to wider Lutheran and ecumenical bodies. As NELCSA, we are a member church of:

- United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (UELCSA),
- Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA),
- Lutheran World Federation (LWF),
- Church Unity Commission (CUC), and
- South African Council of Churches (SACC).

Through these affiliations, NELCSA belongs to broader ecumenical partnerships alongside Anglican, Methodist, Reformed, Congregational, and other Christian traditions. These memberships connect us to a wider witness and common service in South Africa and globally. However, these bodies do not have authority over NELCSA; the NELCSA Synod remains our church's sole decision-making authority.

Global partnerships: The EKD and ELM

Beyond formal membership, NELCSA has relationships with global partner organisations based on mutual accompaniment, theological exchange, and shared mission. Our key partnerships are with the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Lower Saxony (ELM, formerly known as the Hermannsburg Mission Society).

These partnerships are based on accompaniment, not authority. They walk alongside us as trusted siblings that empower our autonomous ministry.

Ecumenical engagement

Ecumenical engagement refers to our participation in dialogue, partnership, and joint witness with other churches and Christian traditions where we are not formal members. This includes bilateral engagements with:

- the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA),
- the Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa (FELSISA),
- other Lutheran bodies (LCSA, RELUCSA, LELCSA, etc.),
- the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC),
- the Evangelische Stadtmission in Südafrika (ESSA),
- and the wider Protestant and ecumenical community.

On congregational level some congregations interact with congregations from other denominations based on shared needs and interests (e.g. diaconical projects).

This engagement does not erase our Lutheran identity but allows us to witness to Christ alongside others, seeking common ground for mission, service, and public witness.

Affiliation secures our place in structures that promote the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, partnership provides essential support for our mission, and ecumenical engagement equips us to collaborate beyond our formal memberships.

As a Church, we affirm all three: a strong sense of belonging within NELCSA, a grateful reciprocity with our global partners, and a bold openness to work with others for the Gospel's sake. Holding these together is a faithful response to God's call to be both rooted and reforming, both Lutheran and ecumenical, and both locally embodied and globally connected.

