##### AUGSBURG STATEMENT OF FAITH

##### (ALC Constitution – Article 2)

**2.01 We believe, teach, and confess[[1]](#footnote-1) the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – three distinct persons in one Godhead.[[2]](#footnote-2)**

**2.02 We believe, teach, and confess Jesus Christ alone[[3]](#footnote-3) as Lord and Savior and the gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe in him.**

1. **Jesus Christ⎯true God, Son of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary⎯[[4]](#footnote-4) is the Word of God incarnate through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection alone[[5]](#footnote-5) God delivers from sin, death, and the devil and inaugurates a new creation.[[6]](#footnote-6)**
2. **The oral proclamation[[7]](#footnote-7) of God's message to us as both law and gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy in the person and work of Jesus Christ through whom God by his grace alone[[8]](#footnote-8) was pleased to reconcile the world and all things to himself.[[9]](#footnote-9)**
3. **The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God.[[10]](#footnote-10) Inspired by the Holy Spirit speaking through their authors, they are the clear and certain testimony of God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ.[[11]](#footnote-11) Through them the Holy Spirit speaks to us creating and sustaining Christian faith and fellowship.[[12]](#footnote-12)**

**2.03 We believe, teach, and confess the Gospel[[13]](#footnote-13) that we are justified by grace alone, that is, by faith alone through Christ alone as the heart and center of the Holy Scriptures, the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran confessional writings.[[14]](#footnote-14) This Gospel is the sole criterion against which all teaching, practice, structure and polity must be judged.[[15]](#footnote-15) It is the power of God for salvation and creates and sustains a holy Christian people and priesthood of all believers for God's mission in the world.[[16]](#footnote-16)**

**Therefore:[[17]](#footnote-17)**

**2,04 We believe, teach, and accept[[18]](#footnote-18) the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the sole[[19]](#footnote-19) authoritative source and norm of our proclamation, faith, and life.**

**2.05 We believe, teach, and accept the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds as true declarations of the scriptural faith we believe, teach, and confess.[[20]](#footnote-20)**

**2.06 We believe, teach, and accept the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism as true witnesses to the Word of God, normative for our teaching and practice.[[21]](#footnote-21)**

**2.07 We believe, teach, and accept the other confessional writings in the Book of Concord, namely, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord, as further valid expositions of the Holy Scriptures.[[22]](#footnote-22)**

**Comments**

The structure of the confession is key to understanding its purpose and content. A brief analysis of its literary origin, its division into two sections comprising its material and formal bases, the imbedding of the so-called “exclusive particles” (*particula exclusiva*) at strategic points, and the substantial alteration and repositioning of ELCA 2.07 follows.

**Literary Origin**

The structure and much of the content of the Augsburg Statement of Faith, as with most other participating groups, originates with that of the ELCA Constitution. We believe this to be completely appropriate. The ELCA Confession of Faith was produced as a joint effort by the foremost theological representatives of the ELCA’s predecessor bodies and thus connects us with our theological and historical legacy as Lutherans in North America. Often, we have heard the lament that if the ELCA had remained faithful to its Confession we would not be facing the present crisis. Like the confessors of the 16th century Reformation, we affirm the tradition of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church which we have received while standing against and resisting the new aberrations which even now are undoing that tradition of faithfulness to the apostolic witness.

**Material and Formal Sections**

One of the most beneficial and helpful aspects of the ELCA Confession of Faith is the structural distinction between its material and formal content. The first section is confession in the sense of profession and witness, the second, acceptance in the sense of subscription. The Augsburg Statement of faith adopts this structure both in the general content of its sections and in its introductory language to each individual statement. “*We believe, teach, and confess…*,” introduces the material statements; “*We believe, teach, and accept…,*” introduces the formal statements.

The Augsburg Statement of Faith further emphasizes the importance of this distinction by adding the word “Therefore” immediately prior to the formal section of subscriptions to scripture, creeds, and confessional writings. This has the effect of making the material confession the basis of the formal subscription rather than visa versa. In other words, e.g., Jesus Christ is not the Word of God incarnate because the canonical Scriptures declare him such, rather, the canonical Scriptures are authoritative because they faithfully bear witness to the Word become flesh among us.

**The Exclusive Particles – The Solas**

While the ELCA Confession of Faith has much to commend it, it also contains, in our view, deficiencies which we have sought to correct. One of the most serious is the failure altogether to include the so-called exclusive particles (*particula exclusiva*) in conjunction with the key affirmations of the Lutheran witness, beginning with the almost ubiquitous *sola scriptura* in the ELCA’s predecessor bodies.While these omissions may for some have the advantage of subduing the polemical tone, we believe that it robs our ecumenical witness of its distinctive contribution and obscures the distinction between Law and Gospel. The Augsburg Statement of Faith therefore embeds the five Lutheran “*sola*’s”: Christ alone (no other mediator), cross alone (not glory), grace alone (not merit), faith alone (not works), and scripture alone (not tradition) in its articles.

**Justification as a Proposal of Dogma**

The material section of the of the ELCA Confession is a summary statement of the two principle dogmas universally recognized by the church catholic: the dogmas of the Trinity and the Person of Christ which is stated in terms of the threefold definition of the Word of God. The formal section of the ELCA Confession follows with its acceptance of scripture, creed, and confession, respectively to their own degree as authoritative and normative for proclamation, faith, and life. Then follows, almost, it seems, as an afterthought, one last material confession. “The Gospel,” as recorded and confessed is affirmed “as the power of God to sustain the Church for God’s mission in the world.”

In our opinion, this statement is misplaced both in terms of content and location. The Augsburg Statement of Faith has revised it as a forthright expression of the Reformation doctrine of justification as the article upon which the church stands and falls; it has relocated it where it belongs structurally as the last of the statements in the material section; lastly, it advocates its hermeneutical function as a proposal of dogma for the whole church alongside of the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas.

##### AUGSBURG STATEMENT OF FAITH

##### (ALC Constitution – Article 2)

* 1. **We believe, teach, and confess the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – three distinct persons in one Godhead.**
  2. **We believe, teach, and confess Jesus Christ alone as Lord and Savior and the gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe in him.**

1. **Jesus Christ⎯true God, Son of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary⎯is the Word of God incarnate through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection alone God delivers from sin, death, and the devil and inaugurates a new creation.**
2. **The oral proclamation of God's message to us as both law and gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy in the person and work of Jesus Christ through whom God by his grace alone was pleased to reconcile the world and all things to himself.**
3. **The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God. Inspired by the Holy Spirit speaking through their authors, they are the clear and certain testimony of God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them the Holy Spirit speaks to us creating and sustaining Christian faith and fellowship.**
   1. **We believe, teach, and confess the Gospel that we are justified by grace alone, that is, by faith alone through Christ alone as the heart and center of the Holy Scriptures, the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran confessional writings. This Gospel is the sole criterion against which all teaching, practice, structure and polity must be judged. It is the power of God for salvation and creates and sustains a holy Christian people and priesthood of all believers for God's mission in the world.**

**Therefore:**

* 1. **We believe, teach, and accept the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the sole authoritative source and norm of our proclamation, faith, and life.**
  2. **We believe, teach, and accept the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds as true declarations of the scriptural faith we believe, teach, and confess.**
  3. **We believe, teach, and accept the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism as true witnesses to the Word of God, normative for our teaching and practice.**
  4. **We believe, teach, and accept the other confessional writings in the Book of Concord, namely, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord, as further valid expositions of the Holy Scriptures.**

##### ELCA STATEMENT OF FAITH

##### (ELCA Constitution – Chapter 2)

**2.01. This church confesses the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

**2.02. This church confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.**

**a. Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation.**

**b. The proclamation of God’s message to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.**

**c. The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God’s Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God’s revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God’s Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.**

**2.03. This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life.**

**2.04. This church accepts the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds as true declarations of the faith of this church.**

**2.05. This church accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true witness to the Gospel, acknowledging as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.**

**2.06. This church accepts the other confessional writings in the Book of Concord, namely, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise, the Small Catechism, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord, as further valid interpretations of the faith of the Church.**

**2.07. This church confesses the Gospel, recorded in the Holy Scripture and confessed in the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confessional writings, as the power of God to create and sustain the Church for God’s mission in the world.**

1. The ELCA Confession reads “This church confesses…” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. **three distinct persons** etc. The ELCA Confession does not include this brief definition from the *United Testimony of Faith and Life*, adopted as the doctrinal basis for the formation of the American Lutheran Church in 1960. The United testimony continues: “These personal distinctions in the Godhead cannot be denied or obscured without impairing the truth and power of the Christian Gospel.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. **Jesus Christ alone**… *Sola Christus*: There is no mediator between God and humans other than Jesus Christ. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me” (Jn 14:6). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. **⎯true God, Son of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary⎯** ELCA Confession does not include this brief definition from the *Small Catechism* (*SC*, II, 2).

   [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. …**whose life, death, and resurrection alone…** *Sola crucis est nostra theologia*: God is known through neither signs nor wisdom (1 Cor 1:22-23). “He [only] deserves to be called a theologian who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross” (Thesis 20, *Heidelberg Disputation*). “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. …**God delivers from sin, death, and the devil and inaugurates a new creation.** ELCA Confession reads: “God fashions a new creation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. … **The oral proclamation**… ELCA Confession omits the word “oral.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. … **by his grace alone** … *Sola gratia*: not merit but free and undeserved favor. “The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it” (Thesis 28, *Heidelberg Disputation*). God does not love because of any merit or worthiness of the individual, but rather He bestows merit and worthiness to the object of His love. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. …**revealing judgment and mercy in the person and work of Jesus Christ through whom God by his grace alone was pleased to reconcile the world and all things to himself. The** ELCA Confession reads: “…revealing judgment and mercy, through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.” The Augsburg Statement replaces the salvation history perspective of the ELCA Confession with a more Christological emphasis. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. ...**are the Word of God. The** ELCA Confession reads: “…*written* Word of God.” To declare that the Scriptures are written seems redundant at best. At worst it fails to recognize that the Word of God properly speaking is always a spoken word in proclamation and sacrament. “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ” (Rom 10:17). Gerhard Forde once quipped about this section, “properly speaking, there is no such thing as the written Word of God.” The scriptural Word is to be spoken.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. …**they are the clear and certain testimony of God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ.** The ELCA Confession reads: “…they *record and announce* God’s revelation centering in Jesus Christ.” Again, the ELCA Confession focuses on the letter while the Augsburg Statement emphasizes the reliability of the Scriptural witness, alluding to the critical Lutheran teaching on the clarity of Scripture. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. …**creating and sustaining Christian faith and fellowship.** The ELCA Confession adds “for service in the world. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. **2.03 We believe, teach, and confess the Gospel**… The ELCA Confession 2.07 “This church confesses the Gospel…” is revised and becomes Augsburg 2.03, the third statement of dogma (proposed!) in the material section of the Statement. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. …**that *we are justified by grace alone, that is, by faith alone through Christ alone.*** While the ELCA Confession affirms the Gospel in general as “recorded in the Holy Scripture …,” the Augsburg Statement defines the Gospel proper specifically in light of the doctrine of justification. The language used here is that provided by the Word Alone Network Theological Advisory Board in its “Admonition” in response to the Called to Common Mission crisis. …**as the heart and center of the Holy Scriptures, the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran confessional writings.** The Gospel of justification thus articulated is not merely one doctrine among many but the heart and center. For Lutherans, it is our “canon within the canon.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. …**This Gospel is the sole criterion against which all teaching, practice, structure and polity must be judged.** The doctrine of justification is the hermeneutical sieve through which everything else is pressed. This understanding of its critical, meta-theological function in the church is the basis for the claim that this assertion is nothing less than a proposal of dogma for the whole church catholic. This is what it means to say that it is the “article upon which the church stands and falls.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. **It is the power of God for salvation and creates and sustains a holy Christian people and priesthood of all believers for God's mission in the world.**  The ELCA Confession reads: “[it is the] power of God to create and sustain the Church for God’s mission in the world.”

    [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. **Therefore:** The use of this connecting adverb signals the transition to the formal section of the Statement. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. **We believe teach and *accept***… The ELCA Confession reads: “This church accepts…” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. …**the sole authoritative source and norm**… *Sola scriptura*: Scripture not tradition has priority in the church. It is the norm that norms everything else (*norma normans*). “This queen must rule, and everyone must obey and be subject to her. The Pope, Luther, Augustine, Paul, or even an angel from heaven—these should not be masters, judges, or arbiters but only witnesses, disciples, and confessors of Scripture” (*LW* 26, 58). See Gal 1:8-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. …**true declarations of the scriptural faith**… The ELCA Confession reads: “true declarations of the faith of this church.” In accordance with the confessional subscription of Augsburg Statement 2.04, the declarations of the creeds are referred to the authority of the Scriptures as opposed to the authority of the church. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. …**the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism as true witnesses to the Word of God, normative for our teaching and practice.** These confessions are normative because they are normed by Scripture (*norma normata*).The ELCA Confession considers the Augsburg Confession primary because, of its supposed irenic ecumenical tone and intent. Therefore, it adds that “as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. The Augsburg Statement follows the practice of predecessor bodies of the ELCA of ranking both the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism as the primary confessions. It omits the ecumenical proposal. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. …**further valid expositions of the Holy Scriptures.** The other confessions of the Book of Concord are affirmed as valid expositions of Scripture. The ELCA Confession reads: “further valid interpretations of the faith of the Church.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22)