

**Religious Commitment in the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**
Findings from the *Faith Practices* Survey, 2001

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INTRODUCTION

Studies of religious commitment in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) (or its predecessor church bodies) go back to the late 1970s. This is a report on the most recent ELCA survey—the *Faith Practices* survey.

The research design for the *Faith Practices* survey and the content of this report is largely based in the tradition of Glock and Stark (1965; 1968). This is the case for two reasons. First, Glock and Stark were among the first to do survey work on religious commitment. Writing in the late 1960s, they set out a continuum of religious commitment from conservative-traditionalist to liberal-modern that continues to dominate the ongoing discussions of religious commitment. To understand Lutherans in wider context, it is impossible to avoid a discussion of the continuum. Second, Glock and Stark were very interested in the relationship of denominational affiliation to religious commitment. They (1968:55) found that among the members of mainline religious groups the “radical theological reformulation of the twentieth century” received broad support, while in denominations like the Southern Baptists the “rank and file seem almost unanimously committed to the traditional faith of their fathers.”

By the early 1970s, the liberal-conservative continuum was put to broader use. Mainline churches were beginning to lose members in significant numbers while the conservatives were growing. In an attempt to account for these new trends, denominations at the liberal end of the continuum were defined by some as weak while the conservatives or “strict” denominations were defined as strong (Kelley 1972; Finke and Stark 1989, 1992; Iannaccone 1994.) Finally, a few researchers have argued that denominational designations for the mainline churches are no longer of use in understanding their member’s beliefs and practices (Wuthnow 1988, 1989; Hoge, et al. 1994.)

As for ELCA Lutherans, studies of religious commitment have shown that members strongly assent to the core elements of the faith, with a non-literalist view of the Bible and with levels of practice that are moderate. This combination puts ELCA Lutherans in the middle (or slightly to the left of middle) on the continuum. With regard to the impact of the ELCA as a denomination, the studies have been confusing and even controversial.¹ ELCA Lutherans never convincingly

¹ For example, the “Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations, A Report for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” (Search Institute, Minneapolis, Minnesota 1990:7) noted

embrace the designated “Lutheran” responses and the results of the *Faith Practices* survey are remarkably similar to those of other studies conducted with Lutherans over the past 20 years. This report, however, takes that work a step further. It shows that Lutherans are committed and that they believe and practice their faith routinely, but the ELCA is remarkably diverse when it comes to how its members approach belief and practices.² In other words, ELCA Lutherans are in the middle of the continuum because the denomination encompasses a broad spectrum of beliefs and practices rather than because everyone is necessarily moderate. Moderates certainly predominate, but the liberal-conservative continuum is also within the denomination itself and this makes it difficult to cleanly specify the impact of the denomination. There are several important denominational consistencies, however, that point to a clear impact. These consistencies are discussed in detail in the second part of this report. It is in large part because of this internal diversity—the continuum within—that ELCA Lutherans provide sometimes inconsistent answers to questions of belief and practice.

In addition to the current study, Gay, Ellison and Powers (1996) have come to similar conclusions with regard to the social and political beliefs of members of certain mainline denominations. They found that Jewish groups and unaffiliated persons are the most liberal and the Southern Baptists and members of other fundamentalist, evangelical, and charismatic groups are the most conservative. But, “between these ideological poles we find a sizeable center comprised of Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans” (Gay, Ellison, Powers 1996:8). They go on to suggest that “the mainline Protestant bodies may truly be culturally diverse...” (Gay, Ellison, Powers 1996:13). While this kind of diversity has often been interpreted as a sign of weakness, since uniformity is considered a sign of strength, it could also be argued that the mainline religious groups are producing precisely what they intend to produce and the ELCA in particular has shown the ability to hold disparate views in a single fold for at least the last 30 years. Whether a denomination can survive in the future with these kinds of “strengths” is an ongoing question. For better or worse, ELCA Lutheranism is made up of several distinct faith practice groups, each with its own way of believing and relating to the church.³

“these findings bring some hard words. Part of the rich scriptural heritage is not getting to many Lutherans in the pew. Their responses about how they understand God, how they live their lives of faith, how they do or do not serve their community, and the enthusiasm with which they pursue social justice appear somewhat disappointing when compared with the results for other churches in the study.” These “hard words” were met with a quick response. Many of the differences referred to appear to be statistically insignificant and no tests of statistical significance are reported. There were also questions about sampling procedures and the applicability to Lutherans of the “faith maturity” questionnaire which was designed around the work of Fowler (1981).

² It is not only among ELCA Lutherans that this diversity of faith and practice is evident. Recent studies have shown that even among the most conservative—the “strictest” denominations—members hold quite different views on social and political issues than one might expect (Davis and Robison, 1996; McConky, 2001.)

³ Steensland, Park, Regnerus, Robinson, Wilcox and Woodberry argue that the liberal-conservative continuum should be abandoned as an analytic tool. They note (2000:293):

many social scientist place religious denominations on a fundamentalist-liberal (or conservative-liberal)

THE RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT OF THE *FAITH PRACTICES* RESPONDENTS

The Data

Six-hundred Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) members age 18 and over were interviewed in January of 2001 as part of a survey of *Faith Practices*. One hundred ELCA congregations were selected at random and asked for complete membership lists. Forty usable lists were received. Randomized calls were made from within the compiled list of 16,022 members. The design attempted to ensure a proportional representation of the membership of the ELCA with 40 percent of the completed interviews among men. At the same time, persons between the ages of 18 and 24 appear to be underrepresented among the interviewees and persons between the ages of 45 and 54 appear to be overrepresented. Also, as is the case with similar surveys, it appears that those who took part were very committed Lutherans so that infrequent attenders, for example, are underrepresented while frequent attenders are overrepresented.⁴

The instrument used for the interviews was designed to measure the various dimensions of religious commitment as they were defined by Glock and Stark (1968). It included questions on belief, practice, knowledge, experience and consequences.⁵ (See Appendix I.) Also, when possible, a variety of different studies of ELCA Lutherans (or the predecessor bodies) are used for comparison. These studies include the *Lutheran Listening Post Panel I, No. 2* (Office for Research and Planning, Lutheran Church in America 1977) *Lutheran Listening Post Panel II, No. 1* (Department for Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Office of the Bishop, Lutheran Church in America 1981); *Profiles of Lutherans in the U.S.A.* (Reuss 1982); *Views from the Pews: Christian Beliefs and Attitudes* (Johnson 1983); *Lutherans Say... No. 5* (Department for Research and Evaluation, ELCA 1991); and the General Social Survey (GSS) (National Opinion Research Center, Chicago, merged file for 1986 to 1998.) On a few occasions, comparisons are made to the general population using *100 Questions and Answers: Religion in America* (Gallup and Jones 1989.)

continuum based on their doctrines and the beliefs of their members. We feel that characterizing the religious groups in this manner is undesirable on a number of different grounds and often leads to unclear interpretation of findings... In statistical terms the continuum suggests that religiosity can be conceptualized as an ordinal variable, whereas the distinct development of evangelical, black, and mainline Protestantism shows it is more accurate to think of the relationship between these groups as being nominal in nature. In particular, a nominal categorization guards against mainline Protestantism being treated as a diluted form of orthodoxy.

⁴ Thirty percent of the *Faith Practices* respondents said they attended worship weekly; this compares favorably with annual congregational reports filed by ELCA congregations where average worship attendance rates have consistently been one-third of baptized membership. If there is a problem, it is with the large percentage (42%) percent who say they attend “almost every week.”

⁵ The questionnaire originally used by Glock and Stark (1968) was extensively modified and additional questions were added. Michael Rothaar, David Poling-Goldenne and Diane Monroe of the Division for Congregational Ministries of the ELCA worked extensively on the questionnaire.

Being Lutheran

For the most part, Lutherans are Lutheran because of a prior connection to the church. In *Profiles of Lutherans in the U.S.A.* (Reuss, 1982:19) argued that “being Lutheran today is virtually a family affair. Three of every four Lutherans have been raised from childhood as Lutherans. Another 15 percent became Lutherans as a result of a marriage relationship.” In *Lutherans Say... No. 5* (1991), 72 percent of the respondents said they were baptized as Lutherans. In the *Faith Practices* (2001) survey, 75 percent said they were raised in a Lutheran church. Those who did not grow up in a Lutheran church tended to come from Roman Catholic (5%) or other mainline Protestant churches (6%-Methodist; 3%-Presbyterian). About four percent reported being raised as Baptists or in Pentecostal churches and less than two percent reported no religious background.

In addition to the fact that nearly three-fourths of Lutherans have been Lutherans all their lives, there is evidence of long term congregational attachment to the Lutheran church. Forty percent of the respondents to *Lutheran Listening Post Panel II, No. 1* (1981) said they had been members of their present congregations for more than 20 years and 63 percent had been members of the same congregation for more than 10 years. For the *Faith Practices* survey, the 68 percent of the respondents reported attending worship in their current congregations for 10 or more years with 38 percent having done so for more 25 years or more.

The *Faith Practices* respondents were asked about a series of factors that may have influenced their faith. Sixty-nine percent said their families had influenced them “a great deal” and 55 percent said their congregation had influenced them a great deal.

Beliefs

Seventy-five percent of the *Faith Practices* survey respondents said they accepted “most” or “all” of what the Lutheran church teaches. These respondents were very strong on the core elements of the faith including the existence of God (98%); that people need to be saved (88%); that there is an afterlife where people will account for their lives and actions (81%); that Jesus is the Son of God (98%), born of a virgin (85%), died on a cross (95%), rose from the dead (99%) and will physically return to earth someday (91%). (See Appendix II for the full questionnaire frequencies.)

At the same time, the *Faith Practices* respondents, as in *Views from the Pews* (1983) almost 20 years earlier, tended to stress human action as the key component in salvation. For example, when asked “which of the following is the single most important factor in a person’s salvation?” five percent chose the option “It is God’s action; we don’t have to do anything,” while 67 percent chose “repenting and accepting Jesus as savior,” and 17 percent chose “a sincere desire to do what is right.” Eight percent said “being baptized.” It could be argued that “repenting and accepting Jesus as savior” is a fully Lutheran response, though one might expect, because of the

Lutheran emphasis on God's grace, a much higher percentage choosing "It is God's action; we don't have to do anything."⁶

On the Bible, however, the *Faith Practices* respondents were clearly within the fold, though there is still some diversity. The predominate Lutheran view of the Bible is that it is accepted as the primary and authoritative witness to the church's faith and it is the authority for Christian faith and practice. But, it is not "a definitive record of history or science." When asked "which of the following statements come closest to describing your feelings about the Bible," 74 percent chose "the Bible is the inspired word of God. It contains no errors, but some verses are to be taken symbolically rather than literally." This compares to 73 percent of the respondents in *Views from the Pews* (1983:191). Twenty-two percent chose "the Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word, compared to 16 percent for *Views from the Pews* (1983:191).

Practices

While ELCA Lutherans tend to be long-term members of their congregations, their level of involvement is restrained by "Baptist" standards. When asked their rate of activity in their present congregations on the *Lutheran Listening Post Panel II, No. 1* (1981), 25 percent of the respondents said they were "very active" and 41 percent said they were "moderately active" with 34 percent indicating they were "slightly active" or "inactive." In the *Faith Practices* survey 40 percent of the interviewees said they "very involved" in their congregations with 45 percent indicating they were "somewhat involved." Fifteen percent said they were "not very involved" or "not involved at all." Those persons who said they were "not very involved" (13%) or "not at all involved" (2%) were then asked the main reason they were not more actively involved and less than two percent said it was because they "disagree with church teachings on certain issues." The primary reported reasons for noninvolvement were lack of time (40%), health reasons (13%) and family constraints (6%).

The *Faith Practices* respondents were very likely to report attending religious services regularly. Thirty-one percent of the respondents said they usually attend religious services every week while 42 percent attend almost every week and 20 percent once or twice a year. Seven percent said they attend a few times a year or less. Beyond worship, however, attendance at church events drops off quickly. Thirty-four percent said they attended an adult forum or Sunday school class at their church in the past month and 22 percent said they attended a Bible study group on a day other than Sunday in the past month.

⁶ Lutherans still celebrate the Reformation on October 31 and still hold to the basic principles of theology and practice espoused by Luther, such as Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Sola Scriptura: We are saved by the grace of God alone—not by anything we do; Our salvation is through faith alone—we only need to believe that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who died to redeem us; The Bible is the only norm of doctrine and life—the only true standard by which teachings and doctrines are to be judged. Source: "What Lutherans Believe," Published by Evangelical Outreach, Division for Parish Services of the former Lutheran Church in America.

In terms of personal devotional practices, 81 percent of the *Faith Practices* respondents said they said grace before meals in the past week (69%-*Lutheran Listening Post Panel I, No. 2, 1977*); 94 percent prayed or meditated privately in the last week (86%- *Lutheran Listening Post Panel I, No. 2, 1977*); 48 percent read or studied the Bible on their own (34%-*Lutheran Listening Post Panel I, No. 2, 1977*); 52 percent read or studied devotional material on their own; 23 percent bought or read a book about spirituality; and 8 percent visited a Web site devoted to religion or spiritual life.

The level of activity of the *Faith Practices* respondents is significantly higher than what is reported for ELCA Lutherans on the General Social Survey (GSS). For example, while 93 percent of the *Faith Practices* survey respondents said they usually attend religious services once or twice a month or more frequently, about 45 percent of the ELCA respondents on the General Social Survey (GSS) indicated they do so. Nevertheless, the *Faith Practices* respondents show a distinct pattern of practice. The respondents pray frequently and they say grace before meals. They attend religious services regularly, but even among these highly active persons there is considerably less individual Bible reading/study or attendance at a Sunday school or Bible study classes.

To provide some additional context, ELCA Lutheran respondents were compared to Southern Baptist (SBC) respondents using the GSS. Those respondents who said they are affiliated with the ELCA appear to be slightly less likely to attend religious services regularly than those affiliated with the SBC, with a much larger percentage of Southern Baptists attending services “more than once a week” (See Table 1.)

Table 1
How often respondents attend religious services by their denominational affiliation.
(percentages)

	ELCA (N=595)	Southern Baptist (N=1801)
* <i>More than once a week</i>	2	13
Every week	22	19
Nearly every week	9	7
Two or three times a month	12	13
Once a month	10	9
Several times a year	12	13
* <i>Once a year</i>	16	10
Less than once a year	7	8
Never	10	9

* $p > .05$.

Source: Data for both groups come from the General Social Survey (aggregated file for the years 1986 to 1998.)

With regard to the frequency of prayer, the difference between those persons who claim an affiliation with the ELCA or the SBC is not the difference between praying and not praying but in the amount of praying that goes on daily. (See Table 2.)

Table 2
How often respondents pray by their denominational affiliation.
(percentages)

	ELCA (N=595)	Southern Baptist (N=1801)
* <i>Several times a day</i>	20	32
Once a day	37	33
Several times a week	18	14
Once a week	10	8
Less than once a week	14	12
Never	0	0

* $p > .05$.

Source: Data for both groups come from the General Social Survey (aggregated file for the years 1986 to 1998.)

Experiences

The respondents to the *Faith Practices* survey were asked about seven different religious experiences. One percent reported having all seven while ten percent of the respondents reported never having a religious experience. The majority (59%) said they had between one and three experiences. (See Table 3.) Sixty-eight percent said they had an experience of profound inner peace; 63 percent a experience of God’s energy or presence; and 49 percent an experience of a miraculous event. Also, only among these three most frequent experiences is there any inter-correlation but it is modest.⁷

There are also, however, a significant minority of ELCA Lutherans who report more atypical experiences. For example, 31 percent of the respondents said they had an experience of an angel or guiding spirit; 28 percent an experience of overwhelming evil; 18 percent an experience of communication with someone who has died; and 16 percent an experience with near-death or life after death.⁸

⁷ The correlation coefficient between God’s energy or presence and profound inner peace is .31 and the correlation coefficient between God’s energy or presence and a miraculous event is .32. The coefficient between profound inner peace and a miraculous event is .23.

⁸ Only on the question of an experience of communication with someone who has died is it possible to do a direct comparison with the general population. The GSS (1983 to 1991) asked “Have you ever felt as though you

While an experience of profound inner peace or God’s energy or presence are the most common religious experiences, they also tend to have the least reported impact. For example, 56 percent of those who reported an experience of God’s energy or presence said that it strengthened their faith in God, while 90 percent of those who replied they had an experience of a miraculous event or of an angel or guiding spirit said that the experience strengthened their faith in God.

Table 3
 Religious experiences and their impact on faith in God.
 (percentages)

	<u>Had</u> <u>Experience</u>	<u>Strengthened</u> <u>Faith in God</u>
Profound inner peace	68	54
God’s energy or presence	63	56
A miraculous event	49	90
An angel or guiding spirit	31	90
Over-whelming evil	28	67
Communication with the dead	18	70
Near-death or life after death	16	75

Source: *Faith Practices Survey*, 2001.

Knowledge

An important part of religious commitment is religious knowledge and the *Faith Practices* survey contained several questions about the Bible and one on Luther’s Small Catechism. But, because knowledge questions are seldom included on questionnaires, it is difficult to interpret the results. Where comparisons are possible, the respondents to the *Faith Practices* survey were consistently more likely to identify the correct response than were persons in the general population.

Consequences

The Faith Practices survey respondents were asked about their activities in several areas that should be impacted by their religious commitment including speaking about their faith, volunteering, interacting positively with others and contributing to charitable causes. (See Table 5.) Again, it is difficult to know how these respondents stack up to members of other denominations, but these respondents are very likely to have contributed money to their congregations or to other charitable causes. They are also very likely to have volunteered time,

were really in touch with someone who had died?” and 40 percent responded one or more times.

thanked and forgiven others and even conversed about their faith with others. They are much less likely to have invited someone to attend worship—54 percent indicated they had not done so in the last six months which compares to 46 percent saying no to the same question on *Lutheran Listening Post Panel II, No. 1, 1981*.

Table 4
Religious knowledge questions.*
(percentages)

	<u>ELCA</u>	<u>General Population</u>
Could identify Bethlehem as the Biblical birthplace of Jesus.	87	70
Could identify “do unto others as you would have them do to you” as not being one of the Ten Commandments.	75	-
Could name the first four books of the New Testament.	75	46
Could identify Luther’s Small Catechism as a summary of Christian teachings.	67	-
Could describe the basic story of the parable of the Good Samaritan as an outcast who takes care of an injured person.	60	-
Could name Jesus as the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount.	51	42
Could identify Luke as the person typically credited with writing the book of Acts.	19	-

* All differences $p > .05$.

Source: *Faith Practices Survey, 2001* and *100 Questions and Answers: Religion in America* by George Gallup, Jr. and Sarah Jones, 1989.

Table 5
The consequences of religious commitment.
(percentages)

	Yes, on		<u>No</u>
	<u>one occasion</u>	<u>more than one occasion</u>	
In the last six months . . .			
Invited someone to attend worship.	23	23	54
Conversed with someone about personal spiritual life.	53	20	27
Forgiven someone who has hurt or offended them.	46	29	25
Volunteered time at church or other charitable activity.	64	19	18
Gone out of way to thank someone for significant act.	66	22	12
In the last year . . .			
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Regularly</u>	<u>Occasionally/ Sporadically</u>
Contributed money to their congregation	98	85	15
Contributed to other charitable causes	84	-	-

Source: *Faith Practices Survey, 2001*.

RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT AND THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

The Lutheran Case

Lutheran congregations, particularly those associated with the ELCA, have struggled to overcome their ethnic origins. As the American version of Scandinavian and German state churches, they tended to be Scandinavians or Germans living in relatively parochial communities in the South, East and Midwest. At the same time, within these communities Lutherans tended to see membership as inclusive rather than exclusive. Pietistic and revivalist movements sat alongside a host of other more formal expressions of religiosity. Understanding the Lutheran Confessions and “rightly” preaching the Word and administering the sacraments was important, especially to the well-educated clergy. But, uniformity, or enough uniformity among the members, was generally understood as ensuring everyone believed the words of the Creeds and the key points of the Lutheran Confessions. Considerably more room was given when it came to piety or religious experience.⁹ This tendency to define the parameters of religiousness more broadly alongside of a view of the contemporary congregation as a voluntary, but communal gathering that provides the opportunity for identity formation while connecting people with other people and the sacred (Ammerman 1994:352) should lead us away from expecting to be able to define the ELCA based on the aggregate homogeneity of the beliefs of persons who say they are Lutherans. People say they are Lutheran because they attend a Lutheran church or, even if they currently do not attend, they were born and raised in a Lutheran church. They are very likely to accept basic Christian beliefs as they are set out, for example, in the historic Creeds. They are very likely to engage in basic faith practices. But within this context, they tend not to consistently espouse positions that are consciously understood as Lutheran and they relate to the church in different ways. The first empirical studies of religious commitment conducted with members of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) (one of the predecessor bodies of the ELCA) in the late 1970s and early 1980s show this to be the case. In describing the *Views from the Pews*, Wuthow (1983:31) notes considerable diversity in the midst of high levels of agreements on “the core elements” of Christian belief.

As far as the core elements of Christian belief are concerned, therefore, the evidence suggests both consensus and relatively high levels of commitment. Despite this consensus, it is also readily apparent from the data that much diversity exists. Only a handful of the laity happened to give the same response that the theologians had chosen as the most adequate or accurate statement on all ten of the confessional belief questions (2.6%, to be exact.) Most of the laity held other views on at least some of the questions. For example, sizable numbers leaned more toward a concept of faith that emphasized “trying to do what is right” rather than viewing faith simply as trust in God’s grace. On questions about the sacraments, some held that these were essential to salvation, others that they were valuable but not essential, and others that they were merely traditions of the church. Other questions revealed difference of opinion on the nature of biblical inspiration, on beliefs about life beyond death, and on attitudes toward conversion.

⁹ With the possible exception of Lutherans influenced by Hauge.

He (1983:52) concludes later:

One conclusion that can be drawn from these findings is that there is as much doctrinal diversity among active laity as there is among less active members. The reason why some persons hold views that differ from the predetermined confessional response concerning faith, their relation to God, or the sacraments is *not* that they are marginally involved in the church. Even the most actively involved are likely to differ in their specific doctrinal views. By implication, the results also suggest that doctrinal diversity is probably accepted, and perhaps reinforced, among those who participate in the activities of the church. If there were strong pressure to conform to a particular orientation, it would seem doubtful that active participants would express other views as frequently less active participants do.

What is perhaps most consistent about Lutherans associated with the ELCA is that this pattern of diversity in Christian belief—is THE pattern. It has persisted, as long as studies of religious commitment among Lutherans have been conducted and it is quite evident today.

Same Lutherans, Different Groups

These Lutherans are by all indicators a very religious group. They show a high level of commitment. Assent to the core elements of the faith is nearly unanimous and attendance at worship, prayer, their view of the Bible and even the number and type of religious experiences the majority report show a significant, but a restrained type of religious commitment. This is a qualitatively different approach to faith than is evident among the “strict” churches where more belief, practice, experience, knowledge and even consequence is always better as a visible and prized sign of greater religiousness. Lutheran moderation, however, is the predominate form, but not the only form of religious commitment in the ELCA.

Method

A factor analysis of *Faith Practices* survey questions suggested the possibility of four different groups of respondents. (See Appendix III.)

1. A “literalist” grouping around a literalist view of the Bible, angels, the devil, the virgin birth, and the physical return of Jesus to earth, etc. (FACTOR 1);
2. a “church helps” grouping around the view that the church is helpful in keeping a person in touch with a greater power, in learning to live a good life, helping children to learn good values, etc. (FACTOR 2);
3. a “infrequent attending” grouping around attending church services, Sunday school classes and Bible study groups (FACTOR 3); and
4. an “religious experience” grouping around an experience of God’s energy, of angels or guiding spirits, profound inner peace, or a miraculous event (FACTOR 4).

Based on the factor analysis, several different strategies of separating the respondents into groups were attempted. Finally, there was a defining question (or set of related questions) that appeared

to discriminate between groups most effectively and the these were arranged in order of importance based on the assumption that literalism would have most impact on commitment, followed by a distinctive religious experience (in this case an experience of angels), followed by infrequent attendance and so on. In addition to the four groups, there was also a relatively large residual group of persons that said they were very involved in their congregations. They also strongly agreed with the core elements of the faith but they were not literalists nor did they claim exceptional religious experiences or even that they find the church helpful. Whatever it is that keeps this group involved was not measured using the *Faith Practices* survey. At the same time, after a few test frequencies runs, it appeared that this group was, in fact, a group—a corporate or church life group. With these five groups 21 of 600 respondents were left unclassifiable. (See Table 6.)

The groups were created in the order they are presented below—consecutively—so that once a respondent was classified into a group they were no longer available to be classified into another. The details of the classification scheme are presented below.

- I. The *literalists* group consists of those persons who responded. . .
 - a. “the Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word.”
 - b. “there is an afterlife where people will have to account for their lives and actions” or “there is a heaven for good people, while evil people will go to hell.”
 - c. “yes” to the question “do you believe people need to be saved?”
 - d. “definitely true” to “Jesus was born of a virgin.”
- II. The *angel experience* group includes persons who said they had an experience with angels and who were not previously classified as literalists. They responded. . .
 - a. “Angels exist and intervene to assist human beings.”
 - b. “yes” to “have you ever had an experience of angels or guiding spirits?”
- III. The *infrequent attenders* group includes those persons who were not previously classified as literalists or experience. They were classified solely based on attendance. They responded “once or twice a month” or “a few times a year” or “never” to “how often would you say you usually attend religious services?”
- IV. The *church helps* group includes those persons who were not previously classified as literalists, experience, or infrequent attenders. They responded. . .
 - a. “a great deal” to whether the church helps a them to “keep in touch with a power greater than themselves.
 - b. “a great deal” to whether the church helps them to “learn to lead a good life.”
 - c. “a great deal” to whether the church helps them to “make friends with good people.”
 - d. “a great deal” to whether the church helps you to “feel better about yourself.”
- V. The *corporate* group includes those persons who were not previously classified as literalists, experience, infrequent attenders, or church helps. They responded “very involved” to “would you say you are involved, somewhat involved, not very involved, or not at all involved in your congregation?”

Table 6
The groups.

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	Correlation with associated FACTOR*
Literalists	108	19	.29 (FACTOR 1)
Angel experience	128	22	.48 (FACTOR 4)
Infrequent attendance	100	17	.34 (FACTOR 2)
Church helps	101	17	.33 (FACTOR 3)
Corporate	142	25	-

* Using the factor scores, for all the factors $p > .001$.
Source: *Faith Practices Survey*, 2001.

Belief

Because the groups were created using answers to questions on the Bible, the need for salvation, the virgin birth and an experience of angels, differences between groups on these questions should be expected particularly between the literalist and the angel experience groups. But, understanding the similarities and differences between all these groups on these questions is instructive.

Overall, the infrequent attenders hold the least traditional beliefs. (See Table 7.) The infrequent attenders believe that Jesus was God or the Son of God and that people need to be saved, but they are much less likely to believe that God intervenes in daily events or that angels or that the devil either exist or intervenes. Four percent of the infrequent attenders believe that the Bible should be taken literally. The infrequent attenders are also the most likely to say either that all people will go to heaven and/or that salvation is dependent upon “a sincere desire to do what is right.” On the other hand, the literalists are most likely to hold traditional beliefs on these questions. They waver only on the question of angels and the devil where there is a small percentage who believe that angels and the devil exist only on a “spiritual plane.”

As for the other groups, the church helps group and the corporate group share many of the same views with the corporate group being slightly less traditionalist. Those in the angel experience group were between the church helps group and the literalist group. The angel experience group, however, differed significantly with the literalists on the Bible.

Table 7
Beliefs by group.
(percentages)

	<u>Literalists</u>	<u>Angel Experience</u>	<u>Infrequent Attenders</u>	<u>Church Helps</u>	<u>Corporate</u>	<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>p</u>
Accepts most or all of what the Lutheran church teaches	78	75	70	80	76	3.1	4	.55
* <i>God exists and intervenes in daily events</i>	97	94	66	90	80	67.1	4	.00
Jesus was God or the Son of God.	100	99	95	100	96	-	-	-
The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word	100	6	4	7	5	-	-	-
All people will go to heaven	0	14	23	16	13	-	-	-
Angels exist and intervene to assist human beings	84	100	36	57	54	-	-	-
* <i>The devil exists and is active on earth to corrupt people</i>	84	64	31	54	53	65.0	12	.00
People need to be saved	100	91	88	96	87	-	-	-
* <i>A sincere desire to do what is right is the single most important factor in a person's salvation</i>	16	19	28	14	12	26.1	12	.01

* p > .01

Source: *Faith Practices Survey*, 2001.

With regard to belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the virgin birth, the physical return of Jesus and the sinfulness by nature, the literalist were the most traditional and the infrequent attenders were the least. Between these two was the angel experience group followed by the church helps group and the corporate group.

Table 8
Beliefs by group.
(Percent responding “definitely true.”)

	<u>Literalists</u>	<u>Angel Experience</u>	<u>Infrequent Attenders</u>	<u>Church Helps</u>	<u>Corporate</u>	<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>p</u>
* <i>Jesus died on a cross</i>	99	97	89	97	91	20.4	8	.01
* <i>Jesus rose from the dead</i>	99	97	79	97	87	52.2	12	.00
Jesus was born of a virgin	100	87	72	92	80	-	-	-
* <i>Jesus will physically return</i>	89	70	47	77	68	54.1	12	.00
* <i>People are sinful by nature</i>	87	75	52	77	74	39.5	12	.00

* p > .01

Source: *Faith Practices Survey, 2001.*

Table 9
Practices by group.
(percentages)

	<u>Literalists</u>	<u>Angel Experience</u>	<u>Infrequent Attenders</u>	<u>Church Helps</u>	<u>Corporate</u>	<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>p</u>
Within the last week. . .								
* <i>Attended church services</i>	77	70	40	85	91	88.8	4	.00
Said grace before meals	87	81	73	86	82	8.7	4	.07
* <i>Prayed or meditated privately</i>	95	96	85	98	96	20.3	4	.00
* <i>Read the Bible on your own</i>	65	41	22	64	47	51.3	4	.00
* <i>Read devotional material</i>	62	59	24	61	48	42.8	4	.00
Read a book about spirituality	25	26	11	26	23	9.4	4	.05
Visited a Web site devoted to religion or spiritual life	8	6	5	10	9	3.2	4	.53
Within the last month. . .								
* <i>Attend a Sunday school class</i>	36	31	10	53	39	43.3	4	.00
* <i>Attend a Bible study group on a day other than Sunday</i>	35	19	4	30	21	34.4	4	.00

* p > .01

Source: *Faith Practices Survey, 2001.*

Practices

While the literalists and the angel experience groups were most traditional in terms of beliefs, they were no more likely to engage in religious practices than the church helps or the corporate group. The corporate group and the church helps group were as likely as the literalist or the angel experience group to say grace before meals, to pray or meditate privately and to read the Bible and they were more likely to have attended church services in the last week. Strong beliefs (at

least of the literalists variety) or significant religious experiences (such as the experience of angels) produce no higher levels of religious practice among Lutherans than believing that the church makes a person's life better. In fact, the church helps group exceeds the practice levels of the literalists while the corporate group exceeds the levels of those who have experience angels.

Experiences

There is certainly a variety of different religious experiences among the *Faith Practices* respondents. (See Table 10.) An experience of “profound inner peace” is certainly the most common religious experience among these Lutherans with a near death or life after death experience or communication with the dead being least common. Still, over 10 percent of the respondents in each of the grouping report a near death or life after death experience or communication with the dead. The angel experience group is the most likely to report religious experiences followed by the literalists, the church helps group, the corporate group and the infrequent attenders.

Knowledge

The least knowledgeable of these groups, based on these few questions, is the infrequent attenders. (See Table 11.) They were less likely than the other groups to be able to respond to these questions with the correct answers, particularly with regard to identifying the first four books of the New Testament and they were less likely to know that Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount. On the other hand, the literalists group and the angel experience groups were no more knowledgeable than the church helps group or the corporate group. In fact, the corporate group identified the correct responses more often than any other group.

Table 10
Experiences by group.
(percentages)

	<u>Literalists</u>	<u>Angel Experience</u>	<u>Infrequent Attenders</u>	<u>Church Helps</u>	<u>Corporate</u>	<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>p</u>
Had the experience of . . .								
* <i>God's energy or presence</i>	73	75	36	69	62	46.0	4	.00
Angels or guiding spirits	32	100	8	10	5	-	-	-
* <i>Communication with the dead</i>	18	33	11	17	11	26.6	4	.00
* <i>Profound inner peace</i>	76	76	50	78	63	28.0	4	.00
* <i>Overwhelming presence of evil</i>	20	43	23	30	21	22.2	4	.00
* <i>A miraculous event</i>	58	66	34	50	38	33.8	4	.00
Of near death or life after death	17	21	13	12	16	4.5	4	.34

* p > .01

Source: *Faith Practices* Survey, 2001.

Table 11
Knowledge by group.
 (percentages)

	<u>Literalists</u>	<u>Angel Experience</u>	<u>Infrequent Attenders</u>	<u>Church Helps</u>	<u>Corporate</u>	<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>p</u>
Correctly identifying. . .								
“Do unto others...” as not one of the Ten Commandments.	76	80	64	80	77	9.7	4	.05
* <i>The first four books of the New Testament</i>	80	77	54	81	80	28.7	4	.00
* <i>Who preached the Sermon on the Mount</i>	48	48	33	56	64	24.6	4	.00
* <i>The town where Jesus was born according to the Bible</i>	87	91	78	82	93	15.1	4	.01
Who is credited with writing the book of Acts	18	14	12	21	26	10.3	4	.04
* <i>The basic story of the Good Samaritan</i>	57	59	45	64	69	15.3	4	.01
The basic nature of Luther’s Small Catechism	68	68	56	74	73	9.8	4	.04

* p > .001

Source: *Faith Practices Survey*, 2001.

Consequences

Finally, in terms of consequences, it is the infrequent attenders, as one might expect, who are least likely to invite others to worship or to discuss spiritual life or to volunteer their time. (See Table 12.) They are, however, as likely as the other groups to donate money to charitable causes beside their congregation. On the other hand, it is the church helps group that is most likely to do the majority of these things. Interestingly, the literalists are no more likely to have forgiven someone than the infrequent attenders while the angel experience group is the most likely to go out of their way to forgive someone.

Table 12
Consequences by group.
(percentages)

	<u>Literalists</u>	<u>Angel Experience</u>	<u>Infrequent Attenders</u>	<u>Church Helps</u>	<u>Corporate</u>	<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>p</u>
On more than one occasion in the last six months . . .								
* <i>Invited someone to worship</i>	22	27	10	37	22	20.8	8	.01
* <i>Discussed spiritual life</i>	53	59	37	61	53	20.8	8	.01
* <i>Volunteered time for charitable activity</i>	60	69	44	77	73	39.9	8	.00
* <i>Gone out of way to thank someone</i>	55	75	60	69	70	21.8	8	.01
Forgiven someone	41	58	40	52	44	14.1	.8	.07
In the last year . . .								
Contribute money to congregation	98	98	93	100	100	-	-	-
* <i>Contribute regularly</i>	91	83	54	95	94	93.3	8	.00
Contribute money to other charitable causes	79	83	83	88	89	6.3	8	.18

* p > .001

Source: *Faith Practices* Survey, 2001.

Discussion

Lutherans are a committed group and they report believing in the core elements of the faith and they practice their faith routinely, if in moderation. This combination of factors places them in the middle (or slightly to the left of the middle) of the liberal-conservative continuum of religious commitment. At the same time the findings of the *Faith Practices* survey show remarkably diversity when it comes to how members approach their beliefs and practices. ELCA Lutherans are in the middle of the continuum because the denomination encompasses a broad spectrum of beliefs and practices rather than because everyone is moderate. Moderates certainly predominate, but the liberal-conservative continuum is also within the denomination itself and this makes it difficult to cleanly specify the impact of the denomination. There are several important denominational consistencies, however, that point to a clear impact.

First, the diversity itself is consistent. The diversity has existed since the beginning of survey work on religious commitment among ELCA Lutherans. Among the *Faith Practices* respondents there are several distinct groups:

- a group of persons who take a literalist view of the Bible;
- a group that has experienced angels;

- a group that takes neither a literalist view of the Bible nor have they had an experience of angels but who believe the church is of the utmost help to them in their daily lives;
- a group of people who are highly involved in their congregations without being literalist, without an atypical religious experience, or even a belief that the church is of help in daily life; and
- a relatively liberal group that infrequently attends worship services.

It is in large part because of this internal diversity—the continuum within—that ELCA Lutherans provide sometimes “inconsistent” answers to questions of belief and practice.

Second, while there is diversity, the moderates predominate. Literalists make up about 20 percent of these respondents and the most liberal group is the group that attends the least (17%.) Among the corporate group, which is perhaps the other chief candidate for liberalness, 80 percent believe God exists and intervenes in daily life and 96 percent believe Jesus was God or the Son of God. Eighty-seven percent believe that people need to be saved. The church helps group along with the corporate group make up 42 percent of the respondents and these two groups consistently take moderate positions on belief.

Third, to the extent that the continuum is an attempt to measure a particular type of orthodoxy, it is misleading when applied to Lutherans. Lutheran orthodoxy is not Baptist orthodoxy. ELCA Lutheranism is also not a “diluted form of orthodoxy” but another religious alternative. Instead, by the widespread acceptance of diversity, diversity has become part of Lutheran orthodoxy. The assumption built into the continuum, however, is that diversity inevitably means weakness.

Fourth, among these Lutherans, one group appears to be the most committed, setting a standard for other Lutherans—an ideal, if not a Lutheran orthodoxy. It is the church helps group. The church helps group believes God exists and intervenes in daily events (90%); that Jesus was God or the Son of God (100%); and that people need to be saved (96%). They also believe that Jesus died on a cross (97%); that Jesus rose from the dead (97%); that Jesus was born of a virgin (92%). The vast majority of the church helps groups believes that Jesus will physically return to earth (77%) and that people are sinful by nature (77%). If they waver, it is on angels (57% believe that angels exist and intervene) and on an active devil (54% believe the devil exists and is active on earth to corrupt people). They are unlikely, however, to have atypical religious experiences with angels though a majority have experienced God's energy or presence and a miraculous event. Over 75 percent have had an experience of profound inner peace. When it comes to practice, it is the church helps group that is most likely to invite others to worship, to discuss spiritual life, to volunteer time for charitable activity and to contribute regularly to their congregations. They are also as likely as any of the other groups to report forgiving someone. They are not literalists but they are as likely as the literalists to attend church services, say grace before meals, to pray or mediate privately, to read the Bible on their own, to read a book about spirituality or to attend a Bible study group on a day other than Sunday. In short, the ELCA group that believes and practices the faith the most is the group that is also convinced that the church is of greatest help in daily life. Only on the questions of knowledge does the group take second (to the corporate group).

The church helps group is no more or no less likely than the other groups to be lifelong Lutherans or to come from other mainline denominations. In fact, there were no differences among the groups with regard to religious background. In terms of education, the fewest college graduates (26%) were among the literalists compared to a majority among the church helps (52%) and the corporate group (57%). The proportions of men and women among the church helps group was very close to the distribution among the respondents overall. About 23 percent of the church helps group was under 45 with another 38 percent over 65. The literalists (44%) were the oldest group on average while the infrequent attenders group had the lowest average age (18% over 65 with 46% under 45.)

It is unlikely that ELCA Lutherans would actively organize to ensure the predominance of one of these groups over another and each has their own strengths. For analytic purposes, this report has also drawn the lines between groups in a way that minimizes overlaps which exists in the real world. At the same time, the church helps group makes up less than 20 percent of the *Faith Practices* respondents. Why is it that a sense of the benefits of being involved with the church is less widespread and what can be done about it?

Appendix III
Factor Analysis
Rotated Component Matrix
(loadings of .30 or higher are in **bold**)

	<u>Literalists</u>	<u>Church Helps</u>	<u>Infrequent Attendees</u>	<u>Experience</u>
1. View of God?	.47	.15	-.17	-.16
2. View of the Bible?	.42	.20	-.02	-.14
3. View regarding angels?	.40	.09	.10	-.42
4. View about the devil or demons?	.48	.06	-.12	-.32
5. Jesus died on a cross.	.63	.03	-.04	.10
6. Jesus rose from the dead.	.77	.11	-.04	.00
7. Jesus was born of a virgin.	.72	.03	.05	-.01
8. Jesus is God.	.41	-.09	-.36	-.04
9. Jesus will physically return someday.	.60	.08	-.12	-.17
10. Attend church services in the last week?	-.02	-.13	.56	-.20
11. Read/studied the Bible on your own?	-.21	.01	.57	.21
12. Read/studied devotional materials on own?	-.10	-.14	.49	.28
13. Attend Sunday School class/adult forum?	-.00	-.09	.61	-.02
14. Attend Bible study on day other than Sunday?	-.04	.02	.64	.15
15. Experience of God's energy or presence?	-.10	-.10	.28	.60
16. Experience of angels or guiding spirits?	-.05	-.10	-.13	.59
17. Experience of profound inner peace?	.01	-.02	.33	.47
18. Experienced a miraculous event?	-.12	-.06	.03	.62
19. How involved in your congregation?	.04	.31	-.61	.04
20. Church helps you keep in touch with a greater power?	.15	.63	-.17	-.14
21. Church helps learning to lead a good life?	.09	.79	-.10	.01
22. Church helps helping children to learn good values?	.05	.73	.03	-.07
23. Church helps making friends with good people?	.10	.66	-.17	-.10
24. Church helps feeling better about yourself?	.10	.71	-.05	-.08

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Appendix I

Religious Commitment Questions by Dimension

Beliefs

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>	<u>Percent</u>
1. Which of the following statements best describes your view of God?	God exists and intervenes in daily events. God exists but does not intervene in daily events God is a spiritual ideal, not an actual being God does not exist No opinion	82.0%
2. Best describes your view of Jesus?	Jesus was God or the son of God. Jesus was a great religious leader like Mohammed or Buddha	97.7
3. Comes closest to your view of the Bible?	The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally.	22.3
4. Comes closest to your view of what happens after a person dies.	There is an afterlife where people will have to account for their actions.	81.0
5. Comes closest to your view of angels?	Angels exist and intervene to assist human beings.	62.8
6. Comes closest to your view of the devil?	The devil exists and is active on earth to corrupt.	55.2
7. Do you believe people need to be saved?	Yes.	88.3
8. Jesus died on a cross.	Definitely true.	94.5
9. Jesus rose from the dead.	Definitely true.	92.0
10. Jesus was born of a virgin.	Definitely true.	85.0
11. Jesus is God.	Definitely true.	79.3
12. Jesus will physically return to earth.	Definitely true.	67.5
13. People are sinful by nature.	Definitely true.	72.8

Practice

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>	<u>Percent</u>
1. Did you happen to attend church services within the last week?	Yes.	73.7%
2. How often do you usually attend religious services?	Every week.	31.0
3. Said grace before meals?	Yes, in the past week.	81.0
4. Prayed/meditated privately?	Yes, in the past week.	94.2
5. Read/studied Bible on your own?	Yes, in the past week.	47.8
6. Read/studied devotional materials on your own?	Yes, in the past week.	51.2
7. Bought/read a book about spirituality?	Yes, in the past week.	22.7
8. Visited a web site devoted to religion or the spiritual life?	Yes, in the past week.	7.5
9. Attended a Sunday school class or adult forum?	Yes, in the past month.	33.7
10. Attended a Bible study group on day other than Sunday?	Yes, in the past month.	21.7
11. How involved are you in your congregation?	Very involved.	39.5

Knowledge

Question

1. Which of the following is not one of the Ten Commandments?
2. What are the first four books of the Bible?
3. Who preached the Sermon on the Mount?
4. Name the town where, according to the Bible, Jesus was born.
5. Who is credited with writing the book of Acts in the Bible?
6. What is the basic story of the parable of the Good Samaritan?
7. Which of the following describes Luther's Small Catechism?

Response

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
Jesus
Bethlehem
Luke
An outcast who takes care of an injured person.
A summary of Christian teachings.

Percent

75.2
74.8
51.2
86.8
18.8
59.5
67.3

Experience

Question

1. Have you ever had an experience of God's energy or presence?
2. Have you ever had an experience of angels or guiding spirits?
3. Have you ever had an experience of communication with someone who has died?
4. Have you ever had an experience of profound inner peace?
5. Have you ever had an experience of the overwhelming presence of evil?
6. Have you ever had an experience of a miraculous event, something that wouldn't normally happen unless God intervened?
7. Have you ever had an experience with near-death or life after death?

Response

Yes.
Yes.
Yes.
Yes.
Yes.
Yes.
Yes

Percent

63.0%
31.3
17.8
68.2
27.5
48.5
15.5

Consequences

Question

1. Have you told someone about worship in your congregation and invited them to come?
2. Have you had a conversation or discussion with someone about your spiritual life?
3. Have you volunteered time at your church or in other charitable activity?
4. Have you gone out of your way to thank someone who did something very significant for you?
5. Have you forgiven someone who has hurt or offended you?
6. Did you contribute money to your congregation?
7. How do you give?
8. Did you contribute to other charitable causes or religious groups besides your church?

Response

Yes, in the past six months, on more than one occasion.
Yes, in the past six months, on more than one occasion.
Yes, in the past six months, on more than one occasion.
Yes, in the past six months, on more than one occasion.
Yes, in the past six months, on more than one occasion.
Yes, in the last year.
Regularly or systematically.
Yes.

Percent

23.0%
52.8
63.8
66.3
46.3
97.7
84.8
84.0

Appendix II

Frequencies for the Faith Practices Telephone Survey

Conducted in January, 2001

Division for Congregational Ministries and the Department for Research and Evaluation

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

(N=600 members of a ELCA Lutheran congregation and over 18 years old)

1. How important would you say your religious faith is in your own life—would you say it is very important, fairly important, or not very important?

84.5%	very important
15.2	fairly important
0.2	not very important
0.2	no opinion/not sure

2. Which of the following four statements **best** describes your view of God?

82.0%	God exists and intervenes in daily events.
13.5	God exists but does not intervene in daily events.
3.0	God is a spiritual ideal, not an actual being.
0.2	God does not exist.
1.5	no opinion/not sure

3. Which of the following three statements **best** describes what you believe about Jesus Christ?

97.7%	Jesus was God or the Son of God.
2.0	Jesus was a great religious leader like Mohammed or Buddha.
0.0	Jesus never lived.
0.3	no opinion/not sure

4. Which of the following five statements **comes closest** to describing your feelings about the Bible?

22.3%	The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word.
50.8	The Bible is the inspired word of God. It contains no errors, but some verses are to be taken symbolically rather than literally.
22.7	The Bible is the inspired word of God, but it may contain historical and scientific errors.
2.5	The Bible was not inspired by God, but it represents humankind's best understanding of God's nature.
0.2	The Bible is an ancient book of human fables, legends, history and moral precepts.
1.5	no opinion/not sure

5. Which of the following four statements **comes closest** to expressing your view regarding what happens after a person dies?

61.5%	There is an afterlife where people will have to account for their lives and actions.
19.5	There is a heaven for good people, while evil people go to hell.
11.8	All people will go to heaven.
1.5	We are reincarnated.
0.7	There is nothing.
5.0	no opinion/not sure

6. Which of the following four statements **comes closest** to expressing your view regarding angels?

- 62.8% Angels exist and intervene to assist human beings.
- 11.8 Angels exist, but only to watch us, taking no action.
- 17.2 Angels exist only on a spiritual plane, not in this life.
- 2.0 Angels do not exist.
- 6.2 no opinion/not sure

7. Which of the following four statements comes closest to expressing your view about the devil or demons?

- 55.2% The devil exists and is active on earth to corrupt people.
- 33.7 Devils and demons are temptations to sin, but not real beings.
- 4.2 Devils and demons exist in the supernatural realm, but not in this world.
- 3.7 Devils and demons do not exist.
- 3.3 no opinion/not sure

8. Which of the following three statements **comes closest** to expressing how you regard the formal teaching of the Lutheran church?

- 75.3% I accept most or all of what the Lutheran church teaches.
- 23.8 I accept some of the Lutheran beliefs but also reject some.
- 0.5 I reject most or all formal teachings of the Lutheran church.
- 0.3 no opinion/not sure

9. Do you believe people need to be saved?

- 88.3% yes
- 7.8 no
- 3.8 no opinion/not sure

10. Which of the following is the **single** most important factor in a person's salvation?

- 17.2% a sincere desire to do what is right
- 67.3 repenting and accepting Jesus as savior
- 8.3 being baptized
- 5.2 It is God's action; we don't have to do anything.
- 2.0 no opinion/not sure

11. Please tell me whether you believe each of the following statements is definitely true without question, possibly true, probably not true, or not true.

a. Jesus died on a cross.

- 94.5% definitely true
- 5.0 possibly true
- 0.3 probably not true
- 0.0 not true
- 0.2 no opinion/not sure

b. Jesus rose from the dead.

- 92.0% definitely true
- 7.3 possibly true
- 0.5 probably not true
- 0.2 not true
- 0.0 no opinion/not sure

c. Jesus was born of a virgin.

- 85.0% definitely true
- 11.3 possibly true
- 2.0 probably not true
- 0.0 not true
- 1.7 no opinion/not sure

d. Jesus is God.

- 79.3% definitely true
- 11.3 possibly true
- 5.0 probably not true
- 2.8 not true
- 1.5 no opinion/not sure

- e. Jesus will physically return to earth someday.
- 67.5% definitely true
23.0 possibly true
4.3 probably not true
1.5 not true
3.7 no opinion/not sure
- f. People are sinful by nature.
- 72.8% definitely true
16.8 possibly true
5.7 probably not true
3.2 not true
1.5 no opinion/not sure
14. Did you, yourself, happen to attend church services within the last week?
- 73.7% yes
26.3 no
15. How often would you say you usually attend religious services?
- 31.0% every week
42.0 almost every week
19.5 once or twice a month
6.5 a few times a year
0.5 never
0.5 no opinion/not sure
16. How often do you read the Bible?
- 16.8% daily
19.5 several times a week
12.8 once a week
11.5 several times a month
10.2 once a month
12.2 once or twice a year
15.7 rarely or never
1.3 no opinion/not sure
17. Where do you do most of your reading of the Bible?
- 62.7% alone
11.2 in a small group
21.8 in a large group such as a church congregation
4.3 no opinion/not sure
18. I'm going to read a list of religious practices. Please tell me whether, in the past week, you have you done any of the following?
- a. Said grace before meals?
- 81.0% yes
18.8 no
0.2 no opinion/not sure
- b. Prayed or meditated privately?
- 94.2% yes
5.8 no
0.0 no opinion/not sure
- c. Read or studied the Bible on your own?
- 47.8% yes
51.8 no
0.3 no opinion/not sure
- d. Read or studied devotional materials on your own?
- 51.2% yes
48.7 no
0.2 no opinion/not sure
- e. Bought or read a book about spirituality?
- 22.7% yes
76.5 no
0.8 no opinion/not sure
- f. Visited a Web site devoted to religion or the spiritual life?
- 7.5% yes
92.0 no
0.5 no opinion/not sure

19. Some people seldom or never pray. Some people pray using formal prayers they've learned, like the Lord's Prayer. And some people pray by thinking or saying their own words. Do you ever pray?

1.2% no
98.8 yes
0.0 no opinion/not sure

20. Are your prayers always **formal** prayers, like the Lord's Prayer, or do you sometimes pray using your own words?

3.7% formal prayer only
60.5 use own words
35.3 both
0.0 no opinion/not sure

21. In the past month, have you attended a Sunday School class or adult forum at your church?

33.7% yes
66.0 no
0.3 no opinion/not sure

22. In the past month, have you attended a Bible study group on a day other than Sunday?

21.7% yes
78.2 no
0.2 no opinion/not sure

23. We're interested in whether or not you personally have ever had any of the following experiences:

a. Have you ever had an experience of God's energy or presence?

32.7% no
63.0 don't know
4.3 yes

a1. Did that experience strengthen your faith in God, leave your faith in God pretty much the same, or diminish your faith in God?

55.8% strengthened faith in God
7.0 stayed the same
0.0 diminished faith in God
0.2 don't know

b. Have you ever had an experience of angels or guiding spirits?

62.8% no
5.8 don't know
31.3 yes

b1. Did that experience strengthen your faith in God, leave your faith in God pretty much the same, or diminish your faith in God?

89.9% strengthened faith in God
10.1 stayed the same
0.0 diminished faith in God
0.0 don't know

c. Have you ever had an experience of communication with someone who has died?

79.9% no
2.5 don't know
17.8 yes

c1. Did that experience strengthen your faith in God, leave your faith in God pretty much the same, or diminish your faith in God?

70.1% strengthened faith in God
29.9 stayed the same
0.0 diminished faith in God
0.0 don't know

d. Have you ever had an experience of profound inner peace?

28.7% no
3.2 don't know
68.2 yes

d1. Did that experience strengthen your faith in God, leave your faith in God pretty much the same, or diminish your faith in God?

79.8% strengthened faith in God
20.0 stayed the same
0.0 diminished faith in God
0.2 don't know

e. Have you ever had an experience of the overwhelming presence of evil?

70.8% no
1.7 don't know
27.5 yes

e1. Did that experience strengthen your faith in God, leave your faith in God pretty much the same, or diminish your faith in God?

66.7% strengthened faith in God
27.3 stayed the same
3.0 diminished faith in God
3.0 don't know

f. Have you ever experienced a miraculous event, something that wouldn't normally happen unless God intervened?

48.0% no
3.5 don't know
48.5 yes

f1. Did that experience strengthen your faith in God, leave your faith in God pretty much the same, or diminish your faith in God?

89.7% strengthened faith in God
8.9 stayed the same
0.3 diminished faith in God
1.0 don't know

g. Have you ever had an experience with near-death or life after death.

84.0% no
0.5 don't know
15.5 yes

g1. Did that experience strengthen your faith in God, leave your faith in God pretty much the same, or diminish your faith in God?

75.3% strengthened faith in God
23.7 stayed the same
0.0 diminished faith in God
0.2 don't know

24. Would you say you are very involved, somewhat involved, not very involved, or not at all involved in your congregation?

39.5% very involved
45.3 somewhat involved
13.0 not very involved
2.0 not at all involved
0.2 no opinion/not sure

24a. What would you say is the **main** reason you're not more actively involved in your church?

- 39.9% no time
- 2.5 no interest
- 1.1 dislike clergy/other leaders
- 1.1 dislike members
- 2.8 don't feel genuinely welcomed or included
- 0.6 church out of touch/realities of today
- 1.4 disagree with church teachings on certain issues
- 0.3 church is meaningless/boring
- 0.6 feel judged
- 13.2 health reasons/not able to get around
- 6.1 family constraints
- 19.3 other
- 11.3 don't know

24a2. Are there any other reasons?

- 4.7% no time
- 2.8 no interest
- 1.9 dislike clergy/other leaders
- 0.6 dislike members
- 0.3 don't feel genuinely welcomed or included
- 1.4 church out of touch/realities of today
- 0.0 disagree with church teachings on certain issues
- 0.6 church is meaningless/boring
- 0.6 feel judged
- 1.7 health reasons/not able to get around
- 5.5 family constraints
- 18.5 other
- 61.7 don't know

25. I'm going to read a list of things that some people say the church does for them. I'd like you to tell me whether your church helps you a great deal, somewhat, very little, or not at all in each of these areas:

a. Keeping in touch with a power greater than yourself

- 70.2% a great deal
- 24.8 somewhat
- 2.3 very little
- 1.3 not at all
- 1.3 no opinion/not sure

b. Learning to lead a good life

- 65.8% a great deal
- 30.3 somewhat
- 2.7 very little
- 0.8 not at all
- 0.3 no opinion/not sure

c. Helping children to learn good values

- 73.3% a great deal
- 20.8 somewhat
- 2.0 very little
- 1.3 not at all
- 2.5 no opinion/not sure

d. Making friends with good people

- 64.8% a great deal
- 30.8 somewhat
- 3.0 very little
- 1.0 not at all
- 0.3 no opinion/not sure

e. Feeling better about yourself

- 60.8% a great deal
- 33.8 somewhat
- 4.2 very little
- 0.8 not at all
- 0.3 no opinion/not sure

26. People's religious faith can be influenced or shaped in many ways. Please tell me whether each of the following have influenced your religious faith and beliefs a great deal, somewhat, very little, or not at all.

a. The congregation you currently attend

55.3% a great deal
 37.3 somewhat
 5.0 very little
 1.7 not at all
 0.7 no opinion/not sure

b. Another congregation

23.3% a great deal
 33.7 somewhat
 13.0 very little
 25.8 not at all
 4.2 no opinion/not sure

c. Church camps or retreats

20.0% a great deal
 23.2 somewhat
 12.7 very little
 38.0 not at all
 6.2 no opinion/not sure

d. Church-related schools or colleges

15.3% a great deal
 20.8 somewhat
 12.7 very little
 43.7 not at all
 7.5 no opinion/not sure

e. A group of people you've been a part of, other than from a congregation

32.0% a great deal
 38.3 somewhat
 11.2 very little
 15.2 not at all
 3.3 no opinion/not sure

f. Your own family

69.3% a great deal
 24.7 somewhat
 2.5 very little
 2.7 not at all
 0.8 no opinion/not sure

g. One or two people you've been close to, other than your family

52.5% a great deal
 35.2 somewhat
 6.2 very little
 5.2 not at all
 1.0 no opinion/not sure

h. Books and religious writings

30.3% a great deal
 46.2 somewhat
 14.0 very little
 7.8 not at all
 1.7 no opinion/not sure

i. Religious sites on the Internet or World Wide Web

2.3% a great deal
 9.0 somewhat
 13.2 very little
 67.0 not at all
 8.5 no opinion/not sure

27. Which of the following is **not** one of the Ten Commandments?

- Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy;
- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you;
- You shall not kill;
- Honor your father and mother.

75.2% Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
 24.8 any other answer

28. Can you tell me the names of **the first four books** of the New Testament of the Bible, that is, the four Gospels?

74.8% Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
25.2 any other answer

29. Who preached what's called the Sermon on the Mount?

51.2% Jesus
48.8 any other answer

30. Can you tell me the name of the town where, according to the Bible, Jesus was born?

86.8% Bethlehem
13.2 any other answer

31. Who is credited with writing the book of Acts in the Bible? Was it Matthew, Luke, or Paul?

18.8% Luke
81.2 any other answer

32. Briefly, what is the basic story of the parable of the Good Samaritan?

59.5% an outcast who takes care of an injured person
40.5 any other answer

33. Which of the following describes your understanding of Luther's Small Catechism? Would you say that it is:

- a worship handbook, a collection of Bible verses;
- a summary of Christian teachings;
- or something else?

67.3% a summary of Christian teachings
33.7 any other answer

34. In the past six months, have you told someone that you get a lot out of worship in your congregation and invited them to attend?

22.8% yes, on one occasion
23.0 yes, on more than one occasion
53.0 no
1.2 no opinion/not sure

35. In the past six months, have you had a conversation or discussion with someone about your spiritual life?

20.3% yes, on one occasion
52.8 yes, on more than one occasion
25.5 no
1.3 no opinion/not sure

36. In the past six months, have you volunteered time at your church or in some other charitable activity?

18.7% yes, on one occasion
63.8 yes, on more than one occasion
17.3 no
0.2 no opinion/not sure

37. In the past six months, have you gone out of your way to thank someone who did something very significant for you?

21.7% yes, on one occasion
66.3 yes, on more than one occasion
10.0 no
2.0 no opinion/not sure

38. In the past six months, have you forgiven someone who has hurt you or offended you?

28.8% yes, on one occasion
46.3 yes, on more than one occasion
19.8 no
5.0 no opinion/not sure

39. Which of the following comes closest to your view about religious training for children?

- 26.0% They should be raised to practice the faith of their parents.
- 68.3 Children should be given a foundation in a specific faith, but allowed to make their own faith decisions as they get older.
- 2.0 They should be taught spiritual awareness, but not necessarily formal religion.
- 2.8 They should be exposed to many different religious traditions and encouraged to make their own choice.
- 0.8 no opinion/not sure

40. In the last year, did your household contribute money to your congregation?

- 1.8% no
- 97.7 yes
- 0.5 no opinion/not sure

40a. We'd like to know whether you have some kind of schedule for your giving. Do you normally give money to your congregation at regular times like weekly or monthly, or do you give only on certain occasions, such as when you attend or on holidays, or is your giving pretty much a matter of when you can or when you think about it?

- 84.8% regularly or systematically
- 10.9 occasionally
- 4.1 sporadically
- 0.2 no opinion/not sure

41. In the last year, did your household contribute money to other charitable causes or religious groups besides your church?

- 15.3% no
- 84.0 yes
- 0.7 no opinion/not sure

42. Gender

- 40.0% male
- 60.0 female

43. What is your marital status?

- 8.0% never married
- 0.7 separated
- 5.7 divorced
- 13.2 widowed
- 71.5 married
- 1.0 no opinion/not sure

44. Are there currently one or more children living with you in your home? By children, I mean persons age 17 or younger?

- 63.3% no children in household
- 11.8 one
- 15.3 two
- 5.5 three
- 3.2 four or more
- 0.8 no opinion/not sure

45. In what year were you born?

- | Age | |
|-------|------|
| 18-24 | 3.8% |
| 25-34 | 11.7 |
| 35-44 | 17.3 |
| 45-54 | 20.2 |
| 55-64 | 15.8 |
| 65-74 | 18.3 |
| 75-84 | 10.5 |
| 85+ | 2.3 |

46. What is the highest level of education you have attained?

3.2%	Have not completed high school.
21.7	high school diploma
22.0	some college
6.5	technical, trade or business <u>after</u> high school
23.5	four-year college degree
6.7	some graduate work
13.3	master's degree
2.3	doctor's degree, MD, Ph.D., etc..
0.8	no opinion/not sure

51. How long have you been attending worship in this congregation?

2.5%	under a year
12.3	1-3 years
16.3	4-9 years
29.3	10-25 years
38.3	over 25 years
1.2	no opinion/not sure

47. How long have you lived in the area you're living in now?

6.8%	under 3 years
10.5	3-7 years
14.3	8-15 years
67.5	over 15 years
0.8	no opinion/not sure

48. Are you now employed full-time, part-time, not employed, or are you retired?

49.3%	full-time
10.2	part-time
4.5	not employed
33.2	retired
0.5	full-time student
1.2	disabled
1.2	no opinion/not sure

49. Are you, yourself, of Hispanic origin or descent, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or other Spanish background?

2.3%	yes
96.5	no
1.2	no opinion/not sure

50. What is your race?

96.7%	White
0.2	African American/Black
0.2	Asian
0.2	Native American/Alaskan Native
1.2	other
1.7	no opinion/not sure

52. Before you became a member of this congregation, were you a member of another Lutheran church, or were you a member of some other denomination, or did you have no previous affiliation.

19.8% I've been a member of this congregation all my life.

2.7 not brought up in any religious faith

0.3 Assemblies of God

0.7 Baptist

1.7 Episcopalian

43.8 ELCA Lutheran including:

- ELCA-Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- ALC-American Lutheran Church
- LCA -Lutheran Church in America
- AELC-Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches
- ULC-United Lutheran Church
- ELC-Evangelical Lutheran Church
- Augustana Synod
- Ohio Synod

11.7 other Lutheran including:

- LCMS (Missouri Synod)
- WELS (Wisconsin Synod) or other

4.3 Methodist

0.0 Moravian

0.2 Mormon

0.0 Pentecostal

1.3 Presbyterian

0.2 Reformed

2.7 Roman Catholic

0.3 United Church of Christ

0.5 non-denominational/independent

0.8 no denomination known or specified

0.0 Orthodox (Russian, Greek, Syrian, etc.)

0.0 Jewish

0.0 Muslim

0.0 any Eastern religion (Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.)

5.5 other

3.5 No opinion/not sure

53. What religious faith were you raised in?

1.8% Not brought up in any religion

15.3 I've been a member of this congregation all my life.

0.5 Assemblies of God

3.3 Baptist

1.2 Episcopalian

46.2 ELCA Lutheran including:

- ELCA-Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- ALC-American Lutheran Church
- LCA -Lutheran Church in America
- AELC-Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches
- ULC-United Lutheran Church
- ELC-Evangelical Lutheran Church
- Augustana Synod
- Ohio Synod

7.8 Other Lutheran including:

- LCMS (Missouri Synod)
- WELS (Wisconsin Synod) or other

5.8 Methodist

0.2 Moravian

0.2 Mormon

0.2 Pentecostal

3.2 Presbyterian

0.2 Reformed

5.3 Roman Catholic

0.5 United Church of Christ

0.5 Non-denominational/independent

0.5 No denomination known or specified

0.2 Orthodox (Russian, Greek, Syrian, etc.)

0.2 Jewish

0.0 Muslim

0.2 any Eastern religion (Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.)

5.2 other

1.7 no opinion/not sure

54. Counting everybody, adults and children, how many people currently live in your household?

18.7% one
 39.7 two
 13.2 three
 18.3 four
 6.2 five
 3.0 six
 1.0 seven

55. How many of these people are members of the congregation you are a member of?

0.7% none
 26.0 one
 36.3 two
 12.7 three
 15.8 four
 5.0 five
 3.3 six
 0.2 seven

56. Thank you so much for your time. I have just one last question. Compared with this time last year, would you say that your religious faith is much more important in your life, somewhat more important, about the same, somewhat less important or much less important?

34.2% much more important
 36.3 somewhat more important
 27.0 about the same
 0.8 somewhat less important
 0.2 much less important
 1.5 no opinion/not sure

Geographic Distribution

<u>Region</u>	<u>Baptized</u>		<u>Completed</u>	
	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Interviews</u>	<u>Percent</u>
1	251,964	4.9%	36	6.0%
2	350,568	6.8%	42	7.0%
3	1,145,940	22.3%	162	27.0%
4	378,392	7.4%	0	0.0%
5	1,046,677	20.3%	171	28.5%
6	514,673	10.0%	18	3.0%
7	603,337	11.7%	39	6.5%
8	500,259	9.7%	63	10.5%
9	354,682	6.9%	69	11.5%
Total	5,146,492	100.0%	600	100.0%

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