

## BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

The Lutheran church bodies of today can trace their roots directly to the Protestant Reformation that took place in Europe in the 16th century. Followers of Martin Luther's teachings were labeled "Lutherans" by their enemies and adopted the name themselves. Lutheran beliefs became widespread, especially in Germany and the Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland and Finland), later spreading throughout the world as early explorers took their faith with them on their voyages.

Lutheranism came to the Americas that way; some of the earliest settlers in the Americas were Scandinavians, Dutch and German Lutherans. As early as the 1620's, there were Lutheran settlers in the states now known as New Jersey and New York.

As people migrated to the New World, they continued to speak and worship in their native languages and use resources from their countries of origin. Europeans from a various regions would migrate to a particular region in America and start their own churches. As the number of these congregations grew, scattered groups would form a "synod" or a church body, and as the nation expanded, so did the number of Lutheran church bodies. (Adapted from: <http://www.elca.org/communication/roots.html>)

A significant number of Lutheran church bodies continue to exist throughout the world. The list to the right provides a glimpse into those known to us within North America. While there may still be some current Lutheran church bodies that exist because of cultural backgrounds, today, a number of them are a result of differences in doctrine and practice.

Suggested additions or deletions from this list can be forwarded to [debra.albers@valpo.edu](mailto:debra.albers@valpo.edu) in the Office of Church Relations at Valparaiso University.

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