

# DENOMINATIONS: Brethren/Pietism

**Religion:** the belief in a god

**Denomination:** a religious grouping where congregations are united in their adherence to its beliefs and practices

**Synod:** Greek for “walking together.” Congregations voluntarily choose to belong to a synod, which is a group of congregations that are in agreement with each other.

## Basic History of Christian Denominations:

1054: “Great Schism” (Split of Orthodox and Rome)

1530: Protestant Reformation

- Lutheranism
- Calvinism
- Anglicanism
- Anabaptism

## Discussion Questions:

What issue could arise if there was no unity in doctrine?

What issue could arise if the focus on Christian faith was only internal feelings?

## History:

An international religious revival began in Germany in the late 1600s with the preaching and writings of **Philipp Jakob Spener** (1635-1705), an influential Lutheran pastor and theologian. Spener decried the barren intellectualism, theological factionalism, and general ineffectiveness of the Lutheran church of his day. He called for a new type of Reformation that would complete the promise of Luther’s Reformation. Martin Luther had reformed the church doctrinally and liturgically; Spener wanted to reform it morally and spiritually. He called for pastors to find ways to make the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers effective in the hearts and souls of the people. His pietist manifesto was titled *Pia Desideria*, which means “pious desires.” It stirred up a spiritual awakening among Lutherans and also created controversy among them.

Spener proposed that pastors form small groups of believers known as “collegia pietetis” (later “conventicles”) to meet for study, prayer, and mutual encouragement. Sunday School, Youth Group, Small Group Bible Studies, and ladies’ aid societies grew out of this idea.

Spener also urged pastors to leave polemics aside (preaching God’s Law and doctrine) and concentrate on edifying preaching that could transform individuals from sinners to laborers for God. His focus was not on doctrine but inward transformation through experience of God. This “religion of the heart” spread throughout Germany and Scandinavia and it profoundly influenced the theology of John Wesley (1703-1791) and his Methodist movement within the Church of England.

When this “religion of the heart,” or Pietism, came to the United States in the 1740s, it helped to fuel the First Great Awakening.

## The Lutheran Vantage Point

In this study we examine denominations from a Lutheran point of view. But we always attempt to describe their systems of teaching fairly.

When the beliefs of these non-Lutheran systems disagree with Scripture, we shall point out why such teachings cannot be considered acceptable.

On the other hand, we shall note with pleasure those teachings that emphasize beliefs also found in the Lutheran Confessions, those teachings often make applications to Christian life, etc., from which Lutherans can gladly learn.

Pietism began among Lutherans in Germany and Scandinavia and began a movement of world missions and social activism.

Spener's successor was **August Francke** (1663-1727). Francke founded the Halle Institutes in Halle, Germany, which became the informal headquarters of Pietism in Europe. He emphasized the necessity of a "struggle of repentance" for authentic Christian conversion. All Pietists emphasized a Christian life of devotion, prayer, Bible reading, and witness. The Pietist movement was the true beginning of what would later become known as "evangelical Protestant Christianity." It spread from central Europe to Great Britain and North America, and to India and Central America.

However, Spener, Franke, and other early Pietists were harshly criticized by more traditional Lutheran leaders for allegedly undermining the objectivity of justification by grace through faith in Christ alone and returning to "mysticism" – which is most related to Roman Catholicism.

While the early Pietists held firmly to the "Solas" of Luther's Reformation, they also wanted to take the principle of the priesthood of the believer further and emphasize the possibility of an unmediated relationship between the Christian and God without the need of a pastor. So many of the traditional Lutherans accused Pietists of "sectarianism," "enthusiasm" (fanaticism), and anti-clericalism (if not downright heresy).

After Spener and Franke, German nobleman **Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf** (1700-1760) became the leader of the Pietist movement as their bishop and spiritual leader. Zinzendorf attempted to unite the Pietists with Hussite Moravian Protestantism. The Hussite Moravians tended toward a more emotional form of worship as they were the charismatics of their time. Many of the Pietists were wary of the Hussite Moravians. Zinzendorf later attempted to unite all the Protestants in Europe, Great Britain, and North America into one denomination he called the Congregation of God in the Spirit. Instead, the Pietists chose to divide themselves into numerous subgroups distinguished by differing views on the Sacraments and degrees of emphasis on inward experience of God. The two main branches of Pietism were "churchly" and "independent." The "churchly" maintained church forms, institutions, and Sacraments. The "independent" emphasized mystical experiences and esoteric knowledge.

Many Pietist church bodies used the name "Brethren" in various forms. For them, the church is primarily a company of brothers and sisters in Christ joined together by the Holy Spirit for mutual edification. The inner spiritual life, piety, is cultivated in prayer and study of Scripture and through association with fellow believers. For most Brethren, the local church is central, but they are often bound in close knit national communities. The church claims their primary loyalty and is understood more as a community of people who love God and one another than as part of an organization or a body that formulates doctrine.

Brethren do not emphasize rigid doctrinal standards; rather, the Spirit of God within each person, which binds them together in love, takes precedence for them. Some place emphasis on prophecy and direct inspiration from the Holy Spirit. They usually live a simple, unadorned life. In their early decades in Europe and in the United States, most were separatists from the state and conventional churches. While not manifesting a judgmental attitude, they devoted themselves to a moral purity that set them apart from other Christians as well as from general society.

Several communal societies in America were established by Pietist groups: Ephrata Cloister and Bethlehem in Pennsylvania, Salem in North Carolina, and Amana in Iowa. Amana survived as a commune until 1932. At that time, it divided between the Amana Business Society and the Amana Church Society. The Amana Church Society to this day does not have ordained clergy.

Pietism had a profound influence on Scandinavian Lutherans, which led many of them to separate from the Lutheran state churches. Some of them maintained a Lutheran identity and theology as they immigrated to the United States in search of religious freedom. Other Scandinavians left Lutheranism and founded new forms of Protestantism, such as the Evangelical Free Church.

### **Brethren**

**SOURCE OF DOCTRINE:** The Scriptures are the source of final authority for Christian faith and life.

**ROLE OF CHRIST/WAY OF SALVATION:** Faith is a gift from God and earned by the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The decision to accept faith is made by the believer.

**SACRAMENTS:** Baptism and the Lord's Supper are both celebrated as ordinances that believers must observe, but they do not serve as a means of salvation.

**THE LAST DAY:** All millennial views are accepted.

### **COMPARING THE CHURCH BODIES:**

#### **Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA, or "E-Free"):**



**Origin:** Pietist revivals in Scandinavia in late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Lutheran Confessions are no longer a statement of faith. Originally known as the Swedish Evangelical Free Mission (1884) and was centered in Iowa, later merged with two Norwegian-Danish groups. In 1912, they merged to form the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Free Church Association. In 1950, the denomination merged with other Scandinavian

bodies to form the present Evangelical Free Church of America, with its headquarters in Bloomington, Minnesota. The church stresses faithfulness to evangelical beliefs while avoiding disputes over minor matters. Affirming both the rational and the relational dimensions of Christian faith, the church maintains that sound Christian doctrine must be coupled with dynamic Christian experience, facilitating a ministry of love and reconciliation.

Motto: "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, charity. In all things, Jesus Christ."

**Source of Doctrine:** The EFCA affirms the inerrancy and authority of the Bible.

**Role of Christ/Way of Salvation:** Faith is a gift from God and earned by the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The decision to accept faith is made by the believer.

**Sacraments/Ordinances:** Baptism and the Lord's Supper are both celebrated as ordinances that believers must observe, but they do not serve as a means of salvation.

**Eschatology:** The EFCA does not mandate a specific eschatological view, either on the tribulation or the millennial question. It accepts all millennial views: Premillennial, Postmillennial, and Amillennial. The EFCA affirms Christ's

#### **What does "Free" mean in Evangelical Free Church?**

The term "Free" has two meanings:

1. The Free Church was free from the state control;
2. Each local church polity is autonomous, that is, free from ecclesiastical control.

<https://national-office.ministries.efca.org/theological-faq>

return will be “personal, bodily, and glorious,” His return “demands constant expectancy,” is our “blessed hope,” and motivates “the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.”

**Life Issues:** The EFCA affirms the inerrancy and authority of the Bible, which is pro-life.

**Sexual Identity:** The EFCA affirms the inerrancy and authority of the Bible, which grounds and guides their understanding of and response to homosexuality and same-sex marriage.

The EFCA defines marriage in the following way: “Marriage is the original and foundational institution of human society, established by God as a one-flesh covenantal union between a man and a woman that is life-long (until separated by death), exclusive (monogamous and faithful), and generative in nature (designed for bearing and rearing children), and it is to reflect the relationship between Christ and the Church.” The EFCA is “welcoming but not affirming.”

**Role of Women:** The EFCA does not ordain women, which is based on the following Biblical texts (Genesis 3; 1 Cor. 11:3-16; 1 Cor. 14:33b-36; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:11-15; 1 Peter 3:1-7). Woman can and do serve in vocational ministry.

#### **Our Lutheran response to EFCA:**

While Lutherans and EFCA share their respect for the Scriptures, the EFCA does not share in our understanding of the benefits of the Sacraments. Any discussion must come from a mutual respect for God’s Word.

### **Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC):**



**Origin:** Grew out of Pietism in Sweden. It was founded by Swedish immigrants in the Midwest and adheres to the affirmations of the Reformation regarding the Holy Scriptures as the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct. The ECC agrees to disagree on many theological topics: evolution, creationism, baptism, and eschatology.

Motto: “All that matters is faith acting in love.”

**Source of Doctrine:** The ECC affirms the inerrancy and authority of the Bible.

**Role of Christ/Way of Salvation:** Faith is a gift from God and earned by the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The decision to accept faith is made by the believer. Views God as a welcoming friend and Christ as a redeeming companion on the pilgrim journey, and a sense of that journey as characterized by great joy and gratitude.

**Sacraments/Ordinances:** Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are seen as divinely ordained ordinances. They have traditionally practiced both infant baptism and believer baptism (leaving the decision whether to have an infant baptized to the parents).

**Eschatology:** Accepts all millennial views: Premillennial, Postmillennial, and Amillennial.

**Life Issues:** The ECC is pro-life.

#### **ECC’s Six Affirmations:**

1. *We affirm the centrality of the Word of God.*
2. *We affirm the necessity of the new birth.*
3. *We affirm a commitment to the whole mission of the church.*
4. *We affirm the church as a fellowship of believers.*
5. *We affirm a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit.*
6. *We affirm the reality of freedom in Christ.*

<https://covchurch.org/who-we-are/beliefs/>

**Sexual Identity:** The ECC excludes same-sex marriage from its theology and practice. It upholds “celibacy, the state of abstaining (outside of marriage) in singleness, and heterosexual relations as the Christian standard.”

**Role of Women:** The ECC ordains only heterosexual men and women.

**Other:** The ECC has made attempts to shed its Scandinavian flavor by sponsoring experimental church plants including very small “emerging churches” and has a “mega-church” in Oklahoma.

### **Our Lutheran response to ECC:**

While Lutherans and ECC share their respect for the Scriptures, the ECC does not share in our understanding of the benefits of the Sacraments and the ordination of clergy. Any discussion must come from a mutual respect for God’s Word.

### **Moravian Church in America, formally “Unitas Fratrum” or “Unity of the Brethren”:**



**Origin:** One of the few pre-Reformation Protestant churches. Its roots go back to John Hus (1372-1415), a Czech reformer who was declared a heretic and burned at the stake for advocating for married priests and having the liturgy in the language of the people. However, the church’s heritage is traced back to 1457 in the lands of the Bohemian Crown, which included Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and the Hussite movement against several practices and doctrines of the Roman Church. Its name is derived from the exiles who fled from Moravia to Saxony in 1722 to escape the Counter-Reformation, establishing a Christian community of Herrnhut, known as “The Unity of Brethren of Herrnhut.” Persecution almost exterminated the church, but in 1722 refugees settled on the estate of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), who was one of the leaders of German Pietism in Saxony. The theology of the Moravian Church is basically Lutheran Pietism, but in recent decades the Moravian Church in America has lost much of its original Pietist and evangelical fervor and become more ecumenical and liberal theologically.

Motto: “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.”

### **The Moravian Church Accepts:**

- The Apostles’ Creed
- The Nicene Creed
- The Athanasian Creed
- The Confessions of the Unity of the Bohemian Brethren of 1535
- The Unaltered Augsburg Confession
- The Small Catechism of Martin Luther
- The Synod of Berne of 1532
- The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England
- The Theological Declaration of Barmen of 1934
- The Heidelberg Catechism

**Source of Doctrine:** The Moravian Church in America understands the Bible as containing the Word of God. “Scripture is the sole standard of the doctrine and faith of the Unitas Fratrum and therefore shapes our life ... But just as the Holy Scripture does not contain any doctrinal system, so the Unitas Fratrum also has not developed any of its own because it knows that the mystery of Jesus Christ, which is attested to in the Bible, cannot be comprehended completely by any human mind or expressed completely in any human statement.”

**Role of Christ/Way of Salvation:** “Christ was the redeeming sacrifice not only for original sin, but also for all other sins that people commit.” However, the Moravian understanding on original sin vary today.

**Sacraments/Ordinances:** Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are seen as divinely ordained Sacraments. Most Moravian congregations use individual cups for Holy Communion. Following the words, “Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sin; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me,” all communicants partake of the cup together and the cup is placed in a pew rack. The church practices “open communion.”

**Eschatology:** Amillennial.

**Life Issues:** The Moravian Church has no official position. “The Bible does not speak directly to the issue of abortion and neither condemns nor condones the act.”

**Sexual Identity:** The theological issues related to sexuality vary from region to region.

**Role of Women:** The Moravian Church ordains both men and women.

**Other:** “Evolutionary theory is not necessarily incompatible with religious belief.” The Moravian Church is in full fellowship with: United Methodist Church (UMC), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Episcopal Church. It is partners with the Presbyterian Church – USA (PCUSA).

**Our Lutheran response to the Moravian Church:**

While the Moravian Church is similar to Lutheranism, it has strayed from its original doctrine and has become theologically liberal. Any discussion must come from common similarities first.

Synod	Evangelical Free Church of America (E-Free)	Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC)	Moravian Church
Membership	357,186 (2012)	231,273 (2015)	31,264 (2010)
Scripture	Inerrant Word of God	Inerrant Word of God	Contains the Word of God
Creeds & Confessions	Emphasizes Word of God over Creeds	Emphasizes Word of God over Creeds	Norm of Scripture
Lord’s Supper	Ordinance	Ordinance	Sacrament
Life Issues	Pro-Life	Pro-Life	No official statement
LGBTQIA+	Affirms the authority of the Bible	Affirms the authority of the Bible	Accepts homosexuality by region

**Sources:**

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Evangelical Free Church of America: <https://www.efca.org>

Evangelical Covenant Church: <https://covchurch.org>

Moravian Church: <https://www.moravian.org>