

## ABOUT THE LUTHERANS

# The Augsburg Confession

The Augsburg Confession, written in the midst of the Reformation tumult, is the core statement of what Lutherans believe. It was produced in 1530, thirteen years after young professor Martin Luther posted the Ninety-Five Theses in Wittenberg. A lot had happened in those thirteen years. Thanks to Luther's creative exploration of the gospel and its implications, his colorful personality (opponents had other adjectives), and the availability of the printing press, his views on religious matters as well as the politics of the day had been widely distributed. In many parts of central Europe, people were responding favorably, to the consternation of the Church of Rome, which had been accustomed to being the single expression of the Christian church in that region.

In the sixteenth century there was no nation called Germany. Rather, the various duchies and electorates made up a key part of the Holy Roman Empire, a remnant of the European territory once governed by ancient Rome. For much of Reformation times, Charles V governed as Holy Roman Emperor. He had watched his empire become increasingly fractured by divisions among princes favorable to Luther and other reformers, and those who kept their loyalty to Rome and the pope. The emperor needed the princes to be unified, not least because a Turkish invasion of Europe had reached the gates of Vienna. And so, in January 1530, the emperor called for a diet, or general assembly, in the German city of Augsburg. He asked the German princes and imperial cities to explain their religious convictions.



*Presentation of Augsburg Confession*

And so, reforming theologians and the rulers who supported them headed for Augsburg—among them, Luther’s colleague Philipp Melancthon and his pastor, Johannes Bugenhagen. Luther himself could not accompany them because he had been named an outlaw at a previous diet. He had also been excommunicated by the pope. He was, however, consulted on the final text via mail.



Upon their arrival in Augsburg, Melancthon, consulting with previous preliminary documents, composed the final text of the confession. The German princes who favored the Reformation viewpoint agreed to it and signed it. On June 25, 1530, the Augsburg Confession was read aloud in German before the emperor and presented in written form in both German and Latin.

The Augsburg Confession (sometimes called Augustana from its Latin title) is now found in a larger collection of Lutheran confessional writings called *The Book of Concord*. It contains twenty-eight parts, or articles. The first twenty-one of these stress points of agreement with the Roman Church of the time, though sometimes with crucial differences. In the last seven, the writers lay out what they see as abuses committed by the church.

The Augsburg Confession continues to guide the teachings of Lutheran churches to this day. Though a product of troubled times, it is filled with witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.