

LUTHERAN-ORTHODOX
JOINT STATEMENT ON THE FILIOQUE:

A Study Guide



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

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A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDING BISHOP

Spring 2025

Dear church,

Seventeen hundred years ago, the first ecumenical council was convened in Nicaea to discern matters central to the Christian faith, namely: *How do we understand Jesus Christ?* The council sought to end disputes about the divine nature of Jesus and his relationship to God — in an attempt to unify all of Christendom. Naturally, debates arose, and different schools of thought emerged. In the end, near-consensus was reached — and later expanded in 381 — which resulted in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. Ever since, Christians have articulated the complexity of the faith in clear and simple terms.

This anniversary is an opportunity to celebrate the God-given gift of our visible unity and an invitation to share that more fully. It is also an occasion to claim our place in the 1,700-year-old conciliar ecumenical movement that began with a common affirmation of our faith “so that the world may believe” (John 17:21).

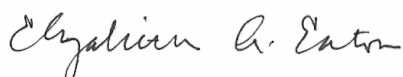
At the same time, this anniversary invites further reflection and even self-critique. A later addition to the creed called the “filioque” (“and the Son”) — made by the Latin Church in an attempt to resolve yet another dispute — has contributed to division between the Eastern and Western churches for almost a millennium. This enduring issue has been meaningfully addressed in a joint statement issued last year by the Joint International Commission on Theological Dialogue Between the Lutheran World Federation and the Orthodox Church. This fruit of 40-plus years of dialogue presents us with the opportunity to move toward healing age-old divisions within Christ’s church, both globally and in our own context.

This study guide seeks to aid our common reflection on this development in the context of the good Lutheran question *What does this mean?* You will find here a variety of ways to explore the mysterious truth of the Holy Trinity through worship, praying the Nicene Creed, guided conversation, and engagement with biblical and liturgical texts and hymns, and to seek local reception of the joint statement with our Orthodox siblings.

I’d like to offer a special word of thanks to the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Linman, pastor of Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church in Phoenix, Ariz., and Lutheran Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Representative for the Grand Canyon Synod, who was the primary author and curator of this study guide. I would also like to thank the Rev. Dr. Dirk Lange, assistant general secretary for ecumenical relations at the Lutheran World Federation and co-secretary of the International Commission that produced the Joint Statement, and Bishop Emeritus Don McCoid, former bishop of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod, former executive for ecumenical and inter-religious relations in the Office of the Presiding Bishop, and longtime co-chair of the Joint International Commission on Theological Dialogue Between the LWF and the Orthodox Church, who served as consultants. Lastly, Deacon John Weit, executive for Worship, and Kathryn Lohre, executive for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations and Theological Discernment, have supported this work on behalf of the Office of the Presiding Bishop.

I pray that your study, reflection and reception of the Joint Statement on the Filioque will not only enliven our commitments to Lutheran-Orthodox relations and dialogue but be a bold witness of Christian unity in a time of deep divisions in Christ’s church and God’s world.

In Christ,



The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

INTRODUCTION

“The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Orthodox Church have issued a joint statement on the addition of the Filioque clause to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, a theological issue that has divided the Eastern and Western Church traditions for almost a thousand years.

“The word ‘filioque’ (‘and the Son’ in English) to describe the procession of the Holy Spirit, was added by the Latin Church to the Creed centuries after its composition to counter Arianism [which denied the divinity of Christ, the Son] but the Eastern Church has always protested this insertion.

“In a Common Statement of the Joint International Commission on Theological Dialogue between the LWF and the Orthodox Church, both partners ‘suggest that the translation of the Greek original (without the Filioque) be used in the hope that this will contribute to the healing of age-old divisions between our communities and enable us to confess together the faith of the Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381).’

“The Commission developed the statement at its 18th Plenary Session held in Cairo, Egypt, in May [2024]. The Commission emphasized that the Creed is a foundational liturgical and doctrinal statement and expressed hope for a renewed focus on Trinitarian theology in the life of churches. ‘We both affirm the full divinity and personhood of the Holy Spirit, which was expressed in different ways in the eastern and the western traditions.’

“The Common Statement is the result of over 40 years of dialogue and ecumenical commitment between the LWF and the Orthodox Church. It is offered as a sign of reconciliation for the 1700th anniversary of Nicaea in 2025. It also marks a hopeful step toward greater theological understanding and unity between Lutheran and Orthodox churches.”

—“Renewed Focus on Original Wording of Nicene Creed Will ‘Contribute to the Healing of Age-old Divisions,’”
[Lutheran World Federation](#), July 30, 2024

Lutheran-Orthodox Common Statement on the Filioque

The Joint International Commission on Theological Dialogue Between the Lutheran World Federation and the Orthodox Church

We, representatives of The Lutheran World Federation and the Orthodox Church, have come together in a spirit of love and Christian communion to discuss the Church-dividing issue of the procession of the Holy Spirit. We both affirm the full divinity and personhood of the Holy Spirit, which was expressed in different ways in the eastern and the western traditions. We know that the Filioque was inserted in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed by the Latin Church in response to the heresy of Arianism centuries after the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed's composition. The Eastern Church has always protested this insertion. As part of the Latin tradition, the reformers inherited the Creed with the Filioque and did not consider it problematic. Valuing this old and most venerable ecumenical Christian text, we suggest that the translation of the Greek original (without the Filioque) be used in the hope that this will contribute to the healing of age-old divisions between our communities and enable us to confess together the faith of the Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381).

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is a doctrinal statement used in the liturgy. The people of God pray the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and in that prayer their faith is shaped by the Triune God. Renewed focus on the original wording of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed may encourage renewed theological reflection on the Trinity and the role of the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, we both affirm that in our Trinitarian doctrine the Father is the cause (αἰτία) of the generation of the Son and of the procession of the Spirit. The Orthodox understand that the Filioque was often meant to underline the relationship between the Son and the Spirit and the Lutherans are aware that in the Orthodox tradition the Spirit is sometimes conceived as proceeding (ἐκπορευόμενον) through the Son. We are also aware that there are other ways to indicate the relationship of the Son and the Spirit. We hope that the exploration of the formula "through the Son" used by Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, and Tarasius of Constantinople and relevant views by Gregory of Cyprus and Gregory Palamas, might facilitate our common effort to reach further agreement regarding the procession of the Holy Spirit.

27 May 2024

lutheranworld.org/resources/document-lutheran-orthodox-common-statement-filioque

“Joint Statement on the Filioque: Background, Content, Hopes”

In October 2024, the Lutheran World Federation published a document entitled “Joint Statement on the Filioque: Background, Content, Hopes – An Ecumenical Resource for Local Churches.” It can be downloaded at lutheranworld.org/resources/document-joint-statement-filioque-background-content-hopes. The statement explains:

“This resource is intended for use in LWF member churches or other settings to enable the understanding and reception of the Joint Statement on the Filioque, drawn up by the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint International Commission on Theological Dialogue during its 18th session in May 2024.

“It contains background to the centuries-old dispute between Eastern and Western churches over the wording of the Nicene Creed, an explanation of the methodology which led to this ground-breaking agreement and the hope that it may inspire Lutheran and Orthodox parishes to engage in joint services, prayers and other activities.”

A set of presentation points based on this resource is available in Appendix A.

Why Use This Study Guide?

This study guide is a resource for planning events and occasions for exploring the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Statement on the Filioque, with special attention to:

- Equipping leaders to understand and appreciate the significance of the joint statement during the 1,700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed in 2025.
- Cultivating appreciation for the ecumenical significance of the history surrounding the filioque, and for the implications of its inclusion or omission from public recitation of the Nicene Creed in Lutheran worshiping assemblies today.
- Shedding light on and deepening appreciation for the ELCA’s decisions regarding the filioque, including the note in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* that offers the alternative text “who proceeds from the Father,” indicating that “and the Son” is a later addition to the creed.
- Serving as a tangible, usable resource for deeper reflection on the Holy Trinity, with special attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity and the relationship among the persons of the Trinity.
- Furthering appreciation for differentiated consensus concerning the understandings of the procession of the Holy Spirit, and applying this methodology to other controversial questions also within a church and thereby moving beyond polemical, binary thinking.
- Making a contribution to the movement toward reconciliation between Eastern and Western churches, especially greater visible Christian unity among Lutherans and the Orthodox.
- Equipping people for local ecumenical exchanges in their own neighborhoods.
- Having a positive impact on worship and on the lives of believers in local congregations and worshiping communities.

Who Might Use This Study Guide

This study guide is of particular value to leaders of the church who have a passion and responsibility for cultivating ecumenical relationships and theological dialogue. These leaders include:

- Theologically engaged members of ELCA congregations.
- ELCA rostered ministers.
- ELCA teaching theologians.
- Members of the ELCA Lutheran Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Representatives Network (LEIRN).
- ELCA bishops.

Where to Use This Study Guide

While there are any number of settings that could occasion engagement with the joint statement, here are some suggestions:

- Adult education events in local congregations.
- Meetings of local clergy groups.
- Seminary courses and events.
- Synod theological conferences.
- Synod Assembly workshops.
- Meetings of and events led by LEIRN representatives.
- Meetings of ELCA bishops.

When to Use This Study Guide

This study guide is intended to provide resources adaptable for a variety of formats. You can use less or more of what is offered here, depending on the circumstances, needs and opportunities of your local context. Consider what follows as an à la carte menu of options from which to choose for local settings.

Occasions for exploring the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Statement on the Filioque might well include the following features:

- Worship, devotions, praying the Nicene Creed.
- Introductory presentation on the joint statement.
- Questions for guided conversation.
- Bible study on passages that relate to the Spirit's procession.
- Exploring Trinitarian hymnody.
- Exploring Trinitarian language in liturgy.
- Next steps toward reception of the joint statement.
- Concluding conversation about next steps toward reception of the joint statement's findings and suggestions.

Tips for Facilitators

Those charged with planning and leading occasions for engaging the joint statement will find this study guide helpful in selecting both format and content appropriate to their local contexts and settings. Furthermore, additional resources linked in this study guide will be beneficial for study and planning. Facilitators would do well to think through their own responses to various guiding questions provided in this study guide. These questions are generally designed to be evocative and thus invite reflection and a variety of responses.

WORSHIP, DEVOTIONS, PRAYING THE NICENE CREED

The joint statement presents an opportunity for enhanced reflection on the Holy Trinity. A time for worship or devotions and the opportunity to pray the Nicene Creed are central to occasions for engaging the joint statement, especially in local churches. Here is a sample order for worship that can be used as is or adapted in ways appropriate to local contexts.

An Order for Worship: Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Statement on the Filioque

Opening

In the name of the Father,
and of the ✠ Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal,
have mercy on us.

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal,
have mercy on us.

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal,
have mercy on us.

Let us pray.

God of heaven and earth, before the foundation of the universe and the beginning of time you are the triune God: Author of creation, eternal Word of salvation, life-giving Spirit of wisdom. Guide us to all truth by your Spirit, that we may proclaim all that Christ has revealed and rejoice in the glory he shares with us. Glory and praise to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever. **Amen.**

Hymn

You may choose a Trinitarian-themed hymn from page 15.

Psalmody

Psalm 8 (read responsively by whole verse, alternating leader and assembly)

¹ O LORD our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!—
² **you whose glory is chanted above the heavens
out of the mouths of infants and children;**

**you have set up a fortress against your enemies,
to silence the foe and avenger.**

³ When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,

⁴ **what are mere mortals that you should be mindful
of them,**

human beings that you should care for them?

⁵ Yet you have made them little less than divine;
with glory and honor you crown them.

⁶ **You have made them rule over the works of your
hands;**

you have put all things under their feet:

⁷ all flocks and cattle,
even the wild beasts of the field,

⁸ **the birds of the air, the fish of the sea,
and whatever passes along the paths of the sea.**

⁹ O LORD our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Word

Gospel: John 14:15-17

A reading from John.

[Jesus said:] ¹⁵“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

Word of God, word of life.

Thanks be to God.

Response to the Word – Praying the Nicene Creed

In order to pray the Creed and not simply recite it, various occasions for silent, prayerful reflection are indicated below to offer time and open up space for such prayerful engagement. The length of the silent time may be determined by local custom and expectations.

Together with the whole church, let us confess our faith.

**We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

Silence is kept for prayerful reflection.

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.**

Silence is kept for prayerful reflection.

**For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living
and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

Silence is kept for prayerful reflection.

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father,
who with the Father and the Son
is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.**

Silence is kept for prayerful reflection.

**We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We acknowledge one baptism
for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Silence is kept for prayerful reflection.

Hymn

You may choose a Trinitarian-themed hymn from page 15.

Prayers

Let us pray to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in communion with all the saints throughout the ages and in all the world.

I invite your prayers of thanksgiving for over forty years of international Lutheran-Orthodox theological dialogue and for continuing dialogue.

Time is kept for silent or additional spoken prayer.

**God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit,
hear our prayer.**

I invite your prayers of thanksgiving for one thousand, seven hundred years of faithful witness to the gospel expressed in the Nicene Creed.

Time is kept for silent or additional spoken prayer.

**God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit,
hear our prayer.**

I invite your prayers for the churches of the Lutheran World Federation and the Orthodox Church, that in their life and witness, Christian unity may be advanced for faithful gospel proclamation.

Time is kept for silent or additional spoken prayer.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit,
hear our prayer.

I invite your prayers that the Joint Statement on the Filioque may also serve the wider ecumenical movement.

Time is kept for silent or additional spoken prayer.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit,
hear our prayer.

I invite your prayers for continued theological dialogue and shared life and witness, that the divisions between churches of the East and West may be reconciled and healed and that also, on the local level, Orthodox and Lutheran parishes may find opportunities for joint witness and service.

Time is kept for silent or additional spoken prayer.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit,
hear our prayer.

I invite your prayers that our efforts at reconciliation may express fulfillment of Jesus' prayer that his disciples may be one so that the world may believe that God sent the Son in love for salvation.

Time is kept for silent or additional spoken prayer.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit,
hear our prayer.

I invite your prayers for the ongoing presence among us of the Holy Spirit, who "gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth."

Time is kept for silent or additional spoken prayer.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit,
hear our prayer.

Gracious Father, we pray for your holy catholic church. Fill it with all truth and peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in need, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.
Amen.

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Hymn

You may choose a Trinitarian-themed hymn from page 15.

Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

The love of God abound in us; the grace of our Savior Jesus Christ fill our hearts; and the life of the Spirit ✠ bless us and give us peace. **Amen.**

INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATION ON THE JOINT STATEMENT

Providing an introductory presentation on the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Statement on the Filioque is helpful to focus and ground participants prior to discussion. A list of presentation points based on the LWF's "Joint Statement on the Filioque: Background, Content, Hopes — An Ecumenical Resource for Local Churches" can be found in Appendix A. Local facilitators are encouraged to adapt this material according to their local contexts.

It may also be helpful to lift up how the ELCA has engaged questions of Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue and the filioque over the past decades. See:

- ["Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue Issues 'Common Statement,'" Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Feb. 19, 1999.](#)
- ["ELCA Council Adopts Lutheran-Orthodox Statement," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Nov. 17, 2006.](#)

Following the 1999 "Common Statement" referenced above, the ELCA embarked on the five-year Renewing Worship initiative, beginning in 2000. This period included study, dialogue and testing of worship resources that, in part, respond to changes in the life of the church and the world, including the question of the filioque. This process ultimately led to the publication of a new core worship resource for the ELCA, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)* in 2006. Ultimately the filioque was included in the Nicene Creed with an asterisk indicating that the phrase is a later addition to the creed with consideration that it may be omitted (*ELW*, p. 104).

As we look ahead, the International Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission will release a joint statement on the Holy Spirit, the church and the world on the Sunday after Easter 2025. This statement will encourage reflection on the role of the Holy Spirit in the liturgy and in our understanding and experience of God's presence in the world, further supporting the connection between the filioque and Trinitarian theology.

QUESTIONS FOR GUIDED CONVERSATION

With an introductory presentation on the joint statement serving to ground engagement about the filioque, it is natural next to turn to conversation among participants. One of the central purposes of the joint statement is to invite further reflection on the filioque specifically and Trinitarian theology more broadly. (See mention of the 2025 Joint Statement on the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the World in Chapter 2.)

Below is a list of questions for guided conversation that may inspire facilitators to develop other questions appropriate for their settings and contexts:

- Language for the Trinity cannot capture the full mystery of the Trinitarian Godhead, and yet language is all we have when talking about God. What are ways in which analogies for the Trinity fall short of capturing the essence of our understandings of the Trinity? What are ways in which language for the Trinity sheds light on and advances our understandings of the Trinity?
- What are key features of how the Trinity is portrayed in the Nicene Creed? Name and elaborate on key words, images, ideas.
- What are distinctively Lutheran understandings of the Holy Spirit, with special attention to the relationship among the persons of the Trinity?
- To what extent is the filioque perhaps adiaphoron (that is, not essential to our understandings of the Trinity) for Lutherans at this point in our history of rich theological dialogue?
- What is gained by omitting the filioque in praying the Nicene Creed in public worship? What is gained by retaining the filioque in the Nicene Creed?
- To what extent should ecumenical hospitality and seeking greater visible
- Christian unity and reconciliation be a factor in our decisions concerning the filioque?
- Beyond Trinity Sunday, how often do you explore the Trinitarian nature of God in your preaching, explicitly or implicitly? How does the relation between Father, Son and Holy Spirit inform your proclamation of God's liberating grace?
- Trinitarian theology shapes baptismal spirituality. How is it present in preaching? How is the spirituality of a congregation shaped by baptismal theology?
- What might it mean to pray the creed and not just recite it?
- How does your prayer and the person(s) you address shape your spirituality? How does it also shape the spirituality you communicate in your preaching, public praying, pastoral acts and witness to the world in word and deed?
- To what extent has the Nicene Creed informed and formed your faith?

BIBLE STUDY ON PASSAGES THAT RELATE TO THE SPIRIT'S PROCESSION

The joint statement invites us to explore and reflect on the nature of the Holy Trinity in the life of the church. Certainly, engagement with the Scriptures is central to our common Christian life together. While the Trinity is not developed as a doctrine in the scriptural witness, there are nonetheless passages that inspired what would become a formal doctrine in the early centuries of the church.

The Scriptures offer diverse witness about the nature of God's involvement in human history, and this includes the Father's sending of the Son as well as the procession of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's relationship to the Father and to the Son.

When considering particular biblical passages that suggest the Spirit's procession in relation to God, the Father, and to Jesus, the Son, here are general focusing questions for study and conversation:

- In what ways do the passages elucidate our understanding of the Spirit's relationship to the Father and to the Son?
- In what ways do the passages continue the mystery of our understanding of the Spirit's relationship to the Father and to the Son?

Local facilitators will want to develop their own responses to these basic questions in relation to selected passages.

See, on the following page, a list of relevant passages that are suggestive of the Holy Spirit's procession.

Biblical Passages Suggestive of the Holy Spirit's Procession

John 14:15-31,
especially verse 16:

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever." And verse 26: "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you."

John 15:26-16:15,
especially verse 26:

"When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf." And verse 16:7: "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you." And verses 16:12-15: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

John 20:19-23:

"When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'"

Luke 24:44-53,
especially verse 49:

"And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Acts 2:1-47,
especially verses 1-4:

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."

John 1:1-18

the Word with God and being God at creation, in connection with Genesis 1:1-5, the first creation story and the wind or spirit from God sweeping over the face of the waters.

Matthew 3:16-17
and Luke 3:21-22

the Spirit descending on Jesus at the baptism in the River Jordan, accompanied by the Father's voice.

EXPLORING TRINITARIAN HYMNODY

Language about the Trinity frequently appears in the church's hymnody. The poetry of Christian hymns has the potential to deepen our understandings of the Trinity. But it is also true that poetic language can have the effect of clouding the truths of the Trinitarian Godhead.

Choose a hymn from among those listed to the right. You may sing it or simply read the text aloud. Then engage in conversation.

Here are questions to guide conversation about Trinitarian hymns:

- Specifically with the Trinity in mind, to what key words, phrases and ideas in the hymn text are you drawn, and why?
- In what ways might the language of the hymn elucidate our understanding of the Trinity?
- In what ways might the language of the hymn inhibit deeper understandings of the Trinity?

Local facilitators will want to develop their own responses to these basic questions in response to selected hymn texts.

See also "Holy Trinity" in the Topical Index of Hymns in the back of each resource.

Trinitarian Hymns in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)* and *All Creation Sings (ACS)*

"Come, Thou Almighty King"
(ELW 408)

"Kryie! God, Father" (ELW 409)

"All Glory Be to God on High"
(ELW 410)

"We All Believe in One True God"
(ELW 411)

"Come, Join the Dance of Trinity"
(ELW 412)

"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God
Almighty" (ELW 413)

"Holy God, We Praise Your Name"
(ELW 414)

"Father Most Holy" (ELW 415)

"Dearest Jesus, at Your Word"
(ELW 520)

"God, Whose Almighty Word"
(ELW 673)

"Creating God, Your Fingers Trace"
(ELW 684)

"Mothering God, You Gave Me
Birth" (ELW 735)

"My Lord of Light" (ELW 832)

"The Play of the Godhead"
(ACS 946)

"Source and Sovereign, Rock and
Cloud" (ACS 947)

"Womb of Life and Source of Being"
(ACS 948)

"Your Canopy of Vigil Lights"
(ACS 999)

"As a Mother Comforts Her Child"
(ACS 1015)

"Glory to God, Whose Goodness
Shines" (ACS 1087)

EXPLORING TRINITARIAN LANGUAGE IN LITURGY

Like hymnody, Trinitarian language appears in the liturgies of the church. As with all attempts to portray the Trinity in language, there are limitations as well as strengths. Should you wish to explore language about the Trinity in Lutheran liturgical sources, you may ask similar questions to those applied both to biblical texts and to the poetry of hymnody:

- Specifically with the Trinity in mind, to what key words, phrases and ideas in the liturgical text are you drawn, and why?
- In what ways might the liturgical text elucidate our understanding of the Trinity?
- In what ways might the liturgical text inhibit deeper understandings of the Trinity?

Local facilitators will want to develop their own responses to these basic questions in response to selected liturgical texts.

Trinitarian language appears in various places in the texts of Lutheran orders for Holy Communion and daily prayer. See the following pages for several examples.

Trinitarian Language in Liturgical Texts in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, *All Creation Sings* and the *Sundays and Seasons Family of Worship Resources*

Various Trinitarian invocations for Confession and Forgiveness and Thanksgiving for Baptism

- In the name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**
- Blessed be the holy Trinity, ✠ one God, who forgives all our sin, whose mercy endures forever. **Amen.**
- Blessed be the holy Trinity, ✠ one God, the fountain of living water, the rock who gave us birth, our light and our salvation. **Amen.**
- Blessed be the holy Trinity, ✠ one God, our creator, our protector, our wellspring of life. **Amen.**
- In the name of ✠ the One who was, who is, and who is to come. **Amen.**
- Blessed be the holy Trinity, ✠ one God, our maker, our helper, and our keeper. **Amen.**
- Blessed be the holy Trinity, ✠ one God, the Word made flesh, our life, and our salvation. **Amen.**

Greeting

- The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

Canticle of Praise — Glory to God

- Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth. Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. **Amen.**

Prayers of the Day for Holy Trinity Sunday

- Almighty Creator and ever-living God: we worship your glory, eternal Three-in-One, and we praise your power, majestic One-in-Three. Keep us steadfast in this faith, defend us in all adversity, and bring us at last into your presence, where you live in endless joy and love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**
- God of heaven and earth, before the foundation of the universe and the beginning of time you are the triune God: Author of creation, eternal Word of salvation, life-giving Spirit of wisdom. Guide us to all truth by your Spirit, that we may proclaim all that Christ has revealed and rejoice in the glory he shares with us. Glory and praise to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever. **Amen.**

Proper Preface for Holy Trinity

- It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God. You reveal your glory as the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: equal in majesty, undivided in splendor, one Lord, one God, ever to be adored in your eternal glory. And so, with all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn.

Thanksgivings at the Table — Various Concluding Doxologies

- To you, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory in your holy church, now and forever. **Amen.**
- All praise and glory are yours, Holy One of Israel, Word of God incarnate, Power of the Most High, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**
- Pour out upon us the Spirit of your love, O Lord, and unite the wills of all who share this heavenly food, the body and blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord; to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, now and forever. **Amen.**
- Join our prayers with those of your servants of every time and every place, and unite them with the ceaseless petitions of our great high priest until

he comes as victorious Lord of all. Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, now and forever. **Amen.**

- Holy and benevolent God, receive our praise and petitions, as Jesus received the cry of the needy, and fill us with your blessing, until, needy no longer and bound to you in love, we feast forever in the triumph of the Lamb: through whom all glory and honor is yours, O God, O Living One, with the Holy Spirit, in your holy church, now and forever. **Amen.**
- Blessing, praise, and thanks to you, holy God, through Christ Jesus, by your Spirit, in your church, without end. **Amen.**
- God most majestic, O God most motherly, O God our strength and our song, you show us a vision of a tree of life with fruits for all and leaves that heal the nations. Grant us such life, the life of the Father to the Son, the life of the Spirit of our risen Savior, life in you, now and forever. **Amen.**
- God before time, O God at the end, Father, Son, and Spirit, we laud you, Covenant Lord, our Redeemer, the Strength of truth. Glory and praise, blessing and worship, honor and power and might be to you, our God, forever and ever. **Amen.**

Various Blessings at the Sending

- Almighty God, Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever. **Amen.**
- The Spirit of the triune God ☩ bless you with joy, anoint you with compassion, and send you in love. **Amen.**
- God our tender parent, God the crucified one, God the reconciling Spirit, ☩ bless you now and forever. **Amen.**
- The triune God, who was, who is, and who is to come, Sovereign, ☩ Savior, and Spirit, light your way with resurrection dawn, now and always. **Amen.**
- The love of God abound in you; the grace of our Savior Jesus Christ fill your hearts; and the life of the Spirit ☩ bless you and give you peace. **Amen.**

- God the eternal Word, who dwells with us in Jesus, and who holds us in the grace of the Holy Spirit, ✠ bless you now and forever. **Amen.**
- God bless you and keep you, ✠ Jesus grant you grace and truth, and the Spirit send peace upon your hearts, now and forever. **Amen.**
- Holy Eternal Majesty, Holy Incarnate Word, Holy Abiding Spirit, ✠ bless you now and forever. **Amen.**
- The holy Three, the holy One increase your hope, strengthen your faith, deepen your love, and ✠ grant you peace. **Amen.**

Morning Prayer — Glory to the Father

- Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. **Amen.**

Morning Prayer — Blessing

- Almighty God, who gives us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit and forgives us all our sins, strengthen us in all goodness and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

NEXT STEPS TOWARD RECEPTION OF THE JOINT STATEMENT

With an eye toward reception and promoting greater visible Christian unity among Lutherans and the Orthodox, occasions for engaging the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Statement on the Filioque would do well to include conversation about practical next steps, remembering that reception includes further study, listening to each other and putting into practice our common understandings.

Local facilitators will want to develop their own responses to basic questions in ways appropriate to their settings and contexts. They should also feel free to develop their own questions for conversation, appropriate to their local settings and contexts.

Questions to Guide Next Practical Steps

- Who are our Orthodox neighbors? How best can we reach out to them and engage them, deepening our relationships with them?
- Practically speaking, how might we inspire Lutheran and Orthodox parishes to engage in joint activities, prayers and joint service to serve greater, visible Christian unity?
- How can we assist Lutheran congregations and other local ministry settings in their discernment and decision-making about retaining or omitting the filioque in the Nicene Creed during occasions for worship?
- What are practical ways to motivate increased use of the Nicene Creed as a confession of faith in public worship?
- How best might we encourage rich Trinitarian reflection in preaching and praying, in teaching in local settings, in the texts of hymns and songs, in catechetical instruction, and in other expressions that constitute worship?
- How can we motivate greater reflection on the Holy Spirit among Lutherans both in doing theology and in ecclesial practice?
- What are the implications of the joint statement beyond Lutheran and Orthodox traditions for the wider ecumenical movement?

Additional resources

For further background information as an aid to preparing to lead conversation about the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Statement on the Filioque, see pages located on the website of the Lutheran World Federation:
lutheranworld.org/programs/lutheran-orthodox-dialogue

For inquiries about this guide and its use, please write to
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Points for Introductory Presentations on the Joint Statement on the Filioque

The following points draw from the LWF's "Joint Statement on the Filioque: Background, Content, Hopes — An Ecumenical Resource for Local Churches":

- The Lutheran World Federation and the Orthodox Church have been in dialogue for over 40 years.
- Engagement between Lutheran theologians at Tubingen and the Ecumenical Patriarchate dates to the 16th century.
- Formal international Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue has focused on many topics and resulted in many statements. For a complete list with documentation, see blogs.helsinki.fi/ristosaarinen/lutheran-orthodox-dialogue-2/.
- The 18th Session of the International Joint Commission on Theological Dialogue between Lutherans and Orthodox focused on "The Holy Spirit, the Church, and the World" and sought ways to build on earlier statements as well as to seek ways in which the dialogue could have an impact on the life of believers, thus bringing our churches further on the journey toward unity.
- The commission also had in mind the 1,700th anniversary of the first Ecumenical Council in Nicaea (325) and thus focused on the Nicene Creed.
- Topics of discussion therefore centered on the Holy Spirit in creation; the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation and the proclamation of the gospel; the Holy Spirit in the world; the Holy Spirit, the liturgy and the church; and the Epiclesis (invocation of the Holy Spirit). These discussions included a focused exploration of the filioque clause.
- As a foundational expression of faith for Christians worldwide, the Nicene Creed has been featured prominently in the Lutheran tradition.
- The Nicene Creed is cited in Lutheran confessional writings, along with the Apostles' Creed and the Athanasian Creed, as a way of highlighting the loyalty of the reformers to the apostolic and catholic church.
- Churches of the Lutheran World Federation are encouraged to include use of the Nicene Creed in public worship especially during Advent, Christmas and Easter and on festival days.
- As an inheritance of traditions of the Western church, Lutheran reformers retained the version of the Nicene Creed that included the later insertion of the filioque, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father "and the Son" (filioque in Latin).
- The Greek original, as agreed upon at the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 381, does not contain the phrase "and [from] the Son." The insertion of the filioque clause has divided Eastern and Western Christianity for more than a thousand years. It was introduced in the West to combat the heresy of Arianism (which denied the divinity of Christ, the Son). The addition was made official in the early 11th century and was one of the reasons leading to the Great Schism between the East and West (1054).
- In the past few decades, there have been several attempts at finding a solution to this church-dividing addition. One of these attempts was a decision by the Eighth LWF Assembly in Curitiba, Brazil, (1990) that approved omitting the filioque clause in ecumenical services when the Orthodox Church was present. Other world communions subsequently made similar decisions. These decisions have been reflected in many worship books and resources.
- The 18th Session of the Lutheran-Orthodox International Joint Commission on Theological Dialogue took these decisions and developments into consideration but also sought to encourage a more comprehensive process that would consist not simply of abandoning the filioque clause as if it were a heresy but of inviting the faithful into renewed Trinitarian reflection.

- The subsequent Joint Statement on the Filioque was written and approved by the Joint Commission during its final session of the most recently concluded round of dialogue, held in Cairo, Egypt, in May 2024. It was approved by the LWF Council in June 2024.
- The joint statement reflects the history and trust of over 40 years of dialogue between the LWF and the Orthodox Church. As Orthodox and Lutherans have come to know each other and their theological and spiritual traditions, they have been able to find consensus despite differing approaches and emphases.
- The joint statement takes a new step forward toward consensus and to a less polemical approach to the filioque. This decision recognizes that the filioque need not be a church-dividing issue. It is not heretical, nor is its omission. Lutheran trinitarian theology, as part of the western theological tradition, affirms the Father as cause of the generation of the Son and of the procession of the Spirit and recognizes other ways in which the relationship between Son and Spirit can be described.
- It is important to note that the Nicene faith is the starting point for the Augsburg Confession, which states in Article I: “But there are three persons in the same one essence, equally powerful, equally eternal: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.” This confession highlights the unique relationality in the Trinity, though it does not address the close relationship between Son and Spirit that is prevalent in Lutheran theology.
- As noted in the joint statement, the addition of the filioque addressed a particular contextual crisis in the church. The church in the West struggled with the heresy of Arianism and therefore sought to give special attention to the divinity of the Son. This contextual addition was then also unfortunately politicized in the early medieval period.
- Today, however, it is possible for Lutherans and the western tradition to retrieve the original position: “the Father is the cause (αἰτιος) of the generation of the Son and of the procession of the Spirit.”
- In the joint statement, Orthodox theologians acknowledge the complex history that led to the addition of the filioque. They acknowledge that, in the West, the filioque was meant “to underline the relationship between the Son and the Spirit.” They also recognize that the expression “through the Son” is present in the writings of the Church Fathers (cited in the statement). The expression “through the Son” is therefore not foreign to Orthodox theology. Lutherans also affirm that “in the Orthodox tradition the Spirit is sometimes conceived as proceeding (ἐκπορευόμενον) through the Son.”
- Both Lutherans and Orthodox affirm that there “are other ways to indicate the relationship of the Son and the Spirit.” This rapprochement allows the LWF and the Orthodox Church to extend this invitation for further research and study.
- The joint statement hopes to inspire Lutheran and Orthodox parishes to engage in joint activities, prayers and joint service that mark this anniversary and can strengthen a growth in communion. An ecumenical challenge and opportunity is set before our member churches.
- Both Orthodox and Lutherans recognize the importance of the creed in shaping the spiritual life of the baptized through the liturgy and catechetical life of the church. The joint statement is therefore an invitation to churches to reengage in theological reflection on the Trinity and especially on the role of the Holy Spirit. It encourages LWF member churches to increase their use of the Nicene Creed as a confession of faith and to find ways of implementing a rich Trinitarian reflection in preaching and praying, in the text of hymns and songs, in catechism, and in other expressions that constitute worship. Though the Holy Spirit plays a pivotal role in Luther’s theology, it has not always been explicit in Lutheran theology or ecclesial practice. Yet both the Small Catechism and Large Catechism highlight the unique role of the Holy Spirit (see Luther’s commentary on the Third Article of the Creed).

- The process of reception is one of study, listening and practice. The approval of the joint statement by the LWF Council does not imply that the statement automatically becomes ecclesial practice throughout the LWF communion of churches. The language the joint statement employs — “we suggest” — is indicative of the process. The conclusion of the joint statement encourages more study and further agreement on the procession of the Holy Spirit, and not only among Orthodox and Lutherans. The joint statement on the filioque is offered to the ecumenical movement as a step on the way to reconciliation.
- This Joint Statement on the Filioque deescalates the tensions concerning the filioque. It hopes to contribute to the healing of age-old divisions between Lutheran and Orthodox communities, between the Eastern and Western churches. It hopes to enable us to confess together the faith of the Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) and take an important step on the journey from conflict to communion.
- The joint statement moves us out of either/or battles of the last millennium, with the Orthodox acknowledging the theological legitimacy of the filioque and with Lutherans acknowledging that the filioque is not necessary in the creed, given Lutheran Trinitarian theology. Thus, it is no longer church-dividing.