

Educational Material – Church of Sweden

Evangelical Lutheran, open and democratic folk church

Church of Sweden is an evangelical Lutheran church. Its foundation is the gospel of the Bible about Christ Jesus. Lutheran is that tradition within Christianity to which the Church of Sweden belongs. One of the initiators of the reformation in the 16th century was the German theologian Martin Luther. Church comes from the greek word [kyriake:] meaning "belonging to the Lord." Open and democratic - as the Church is founded in a view of man based on Christian ethics. Folk church as 83 per cent of the people in Sweden are members of the church (1999).

Faith and identity

In the cathedral you find many memories of Swedish church history. The church was built in the medieval time, when Sweden was a Catholic country. King Gustavus I Vasa in the 1520's introduced the Lutheran reformation, mostly due to political and financial considerations. He also appointed the first Lutheran archbishop in Sweden, Laurentius Petri, whose grave is found by the high altar. His brother, Olaus Petri, dean of Stockholm and the king's advisor in church matters, was responsible for the inner side of the reformation: translating hymns, translating the Bible, reorganizing the pastoral education. The first translation of the New Testament in Swedish is published in 1526, and the entire Bible is completed in 1541 (see the frescoes in Our Lady's Chapel in the cathedral). The first Swedish hymn book came in 1526. The second son of king Gustav, king John III (Johan III) supported the tendencies toward recatholicizing Sweden. The third son of Gustav, duke Charles, later king Charles IX (Karl IX), gathered a large meeting in Uppsala in order to establish the Lutheran creed as the Swedish state religion.

Uppsala Convocation 1593

In 1593, the evangelical Lutheran character was finally confirmed as the Uppsala Convocation adopted the fundamental confessional documents of the Church of Sweden. There is always reflection and discussion on how the church in each time should bear witness to and present its faith. The work with the confession is therefore never completed. The Church of Sweden is also a part of the universal church. The reformers of the 16th century never aimed at creating a new church, but rather to reaffirm the original gospel and renew the church. This goal is not achieved once and for all. It is important for the Church of Sweden with continuing renewal in dialogue with other Christian churches.

Faith, creed, teaching

Faith is trust in God, both the trust of the church together as well as the trust of the individual. The creed is expressing your faith. The teaching is the content in the faith and the creed, how they are described.

At all baptisms, the apostolic creed is read. This is one of the oldest summaries of the Christian faith. During the 2000-year long history of the church, other documents have complimented the older ones, bearing witness to issues especially important in different times and places. The core of the faith of the church is Christ Jesus: his life, his death and his resurrection. In order to keep faith and to live on, faith takes new expressions all the time.

Fundamental documents express the faith, creed and teachings of the Church of Sweden:

- The Bible has of course a special position and is the norm for all other documents.
- The apostolic, nicænian and the athanasian creeds from the early history of the church.
- Confessio Augustana, the most important of the confessional documents from the 16th century reformation. Here is also included the catechisms by Martin Luther.
- The Books of Common Prayer (Den svenska kyrkohandboken, 1986), and the hymn book (Den svenska psalmboken, 1986) are important documents from our own time.

Stora boken om kristen tro - Befrielsen (The great book on Christian faith - The Liberation) was published by the Church of Sweden in 1993 by the publishing house of the church, Verbum. It aimed at presenting the faith of the church and ethics of our time in a manner that would introduce discussions. What issues are at stake today?
When discussing contemporary issues, can Christian faith be of help?

Faith - a gift

Faith and creed are very personal matters. You cannot be excluded from the Church of Sweden for believing "wrong". For the church, faith is not a demand/prerequisite, but rather a gift, something that ripens. You can see the church as a meeting place for crucial conversations. In dialogue with others, in common prayer and service, sometimes it is possible to grasp and share even something of the unseen.