

LCMS

Frequently Asked Questions

LCMS View – Christian Citizenship

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Christian Citizenship

What is the LCMS view on the death penalty?

Q: *What is the official stance of the Missouri Synod on the death penalty?*

A: In 1967, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod stated its position "that capital punishment is in accord with the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions." Resolution 2-38 of the New York convention of the Synod reads as follows:

"Whereas, Various church bodies have condemned capital punishment in recent years; and

"Whereas, God's Word supports capital punishment (Gen. 9:6; Lev. 24:17; Ex. 21:12; Num. 35:21; Deut. 19:11; Rom. 13:4; Acts 25:11; and

"Whereas, The Lutheran Confessions support capital punishment:

"Therefore neither God nor the government is included in this commandment, yet their right to take human life is not abrogated. God has delegated His authority of punishing evil-doers to civil magistrates in place of parents; in early times, as we read in Moses, parents had to bring their own children to judgment and sentence them to death. Therefore what is forbidden here applies to private individuals, not to governments. (Large Catechism I, 180 to 181 [Tappert, p. 389])

"Therefore be it Resolved, That The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod declare that capital punishment is in accord with the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions."

This does not mean that everyone who belongs to the LCMS or is a member of an LCMS congregation is conscience-bound to support the death penalty. Individuals within the LCMS may, for various valid reasons, object to the usefulness and fairness of the death penalty as it is being used or considered within a particular governmental system. Although it is clear from Scripture that the government has the God-given right to use the death penalty, the LCMS has not taken the position that the government must use this right if it determines that some other form of punishment would better serve society at large at a particular time and place.

Usage: We urge you to contact an LCMS pastor in your area for more in-depth discussion.

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What is the LCMS view on war?

Q: *I am a member of the Lutheran Church, but I have a few questions concerning warfare. I will be leaving soon to the Middle East region and am wondering where the Lutheran Church stands on the issue of war.*

A: Members of the LCMS equally committed to Scriptural teaching may have differing views regarding justification for war. And they may present equally cogent arguments to support their views. For more information on this topic, you may wish to read an article that appeared in the [January 2003 Lutheran Witness](#) on the "just war" concept and a report from our Commission on Theology and Church Relations titled [Guidelines for Crucial Issues in Christian Citizenship](#). You also may wish to read former President Kieschnick's [statement on peace](#).

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What is the LCMS view on serving in the military?

Q: *How would you counsel someone who asks about going into military service when he feels that it violates the 5th Commandment where it says, "Thou shalt not kill," as I learned it? The current Catechism has "murder" instead of "kill."*

A: In the synodical explanation of *Luther's Small Catechism* it asks, "Does anyone have the authority to take another's person's life?" The answer: "Yes, lawful government, as God's servant, may execute criminals and fight just wars." The reference cited is Roman 13:4, which coincides with the fact that the 5th commandment does not forbid all "killing," but (as the Hebrew word used in Exodus 20 makes clear) sinful and unjustified killing, i.e., "murder." For more information on this topic, we encourage you to read the Commission on Theology and Church Relations report on [Crucial Issues in Christian Citizenship](#), which includes discussions of "Christians, Violence and War," "Christian Conscience," etc. You may also want to contact the Synod's Ministry to the [Ministry to the Armed Forces](#) for additional guidance in responding to this situation.

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