

Q What does “LCMS” mean? *“I often see an acronym “LCMS” attached to the name Lutheran. What does it stand for?”*

A The acronym LCMS stands for “Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.” The word synod is a Greek word meaning, “walking together as one.” The LCMS is one of the three largest Lutheran groups worldwide. The ELCA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and WELS, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod are the other two. The LCMS is the second largest next to the ELCA.

The present LCMS emerged from several communities of German Lutheran immigrants during the 1830s and 1840s. In Indiana, Ohio and Michigan, isolated Germans in the dense forests of the American frontier were brought together. Working together, pooling their resources, a greater good could be accomplished. They pleaded themselves to a conservative confession of faith based on the Bible and the themes of the Lutheran Protestant Reformation. Thus, the word “synod” was used to describe their joint mission work. In later years this Lutheran movement centralized their headquarters in St Louis Missouri. And thus, the acronym LCMS was born.

Membership growth was substantial in the first half of the twentieth century. According to the *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches*, the LCMS had 628,695 members in 1925. By 1950 the number of members had grown to over 1.6 million. Membership peaked in 1970 at just under 2.8 million. In 2006 the LCMS reported 2,417,997 members and 6,155 churches. LCMS membership continues to be concentrated in the Upper Midwest. The five states with the highest rates of adherence are Nebraska, Wisconsin, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Iowa.