# Issues, Etc.

JOURNAL

How the Apostle Paul Said, "Faith Alone"

by Todd Wilken

Wittenberg Trail:

Confessions: My Journey from Roman Catholicism to Confessional Lutheranism

by Katey Price Vogel



Greetings in the Name of Jesus.

In this issue of the **Journal**, I explain how the Apostle Paul clearly taught the doctrine of "Faith Alone" without ever using the words "faith alone" by clearly and emphatically denying a place for works in God's justification of sinners.

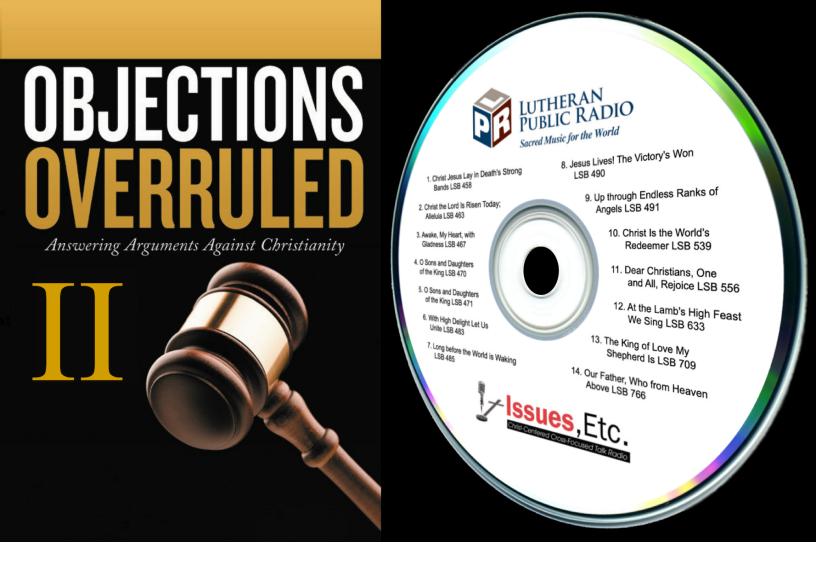
Katey Price Vogel has written our Wittenberg Trail feature. She recounts her life as a mass-going cradle Roman Catholic, and how she could not shake the spiritual restlessness produced by its false assurance of works. Read about her path to the true assurance of Jesus' accomplished work in the Lutheran Confession.

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Todd Wilken, host **Issues, Etc.** 

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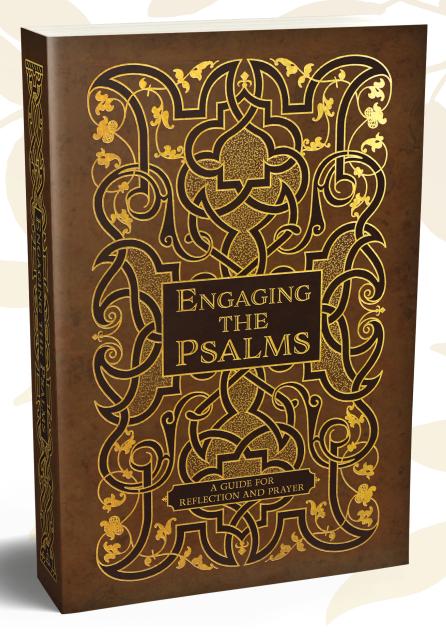
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### How the Apostle Paul Said, "Faith Alone"

#### by Todd Wilken

Men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. (Augsburg Confession, VI, 1-3)

"Faith Alone" is one of the great Solas of the Reformation. The phrase "Faith Alone" occurs countless times in the Lutheran Confessions and the other writings of the Reformation. Protestant Christians around the world embrace "Faith Alone" as a cornerstone of their understanding of the doctrine of Justification.

But the Bible never uses the phrase "Faith Alone." You can search your concordance or your Bible software and you won't find it. So why is "Faith Alone" even one of the *Solas* of the Reformation?

The question is as old as the Reformation —older, in fact. It goes all the way back to the Apostle Paul himself. Paul didn't use the phrase "Faith Alone," but that is exactly what Paul's critics accused him of teaching. In the book of Romans, Paul actually answers the questions of his critics accusing him of teaching "Faith Alone."

Why would Paul's critics accuse him of teaching "Faith Alone" if he never used the phrase? Because that is exactly what Paul taught. Here are the primary passages where Paul taught "Faith Alone" without ever using the phrase itself.

#### **Romans 3:28**

We conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

Paul is contrasting faith with works as the means by which we are declared righteous before God. It is very important to note that for Paul, faith and works are mutually exclusive as the means of justification. For Paul, we are declared righteous before God either by faith alone or by works alone. He explains this either/or framework by describing how the Old Testament patriarch Abraham was justified:

If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. (Rom. 4:2-5)

Paul has previously stated that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 3:23-24) If God justifies freely, He cannot justify based on works. This is why Paul then mentions David: "just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works." If works and faith are mutually exclusive as means of justification, then God justifies through faith alone.

#### Galatians 2:16

...a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Three times in this single verse Paul excludes works from justification. Again, the contrast between faith and works as means of justification is key. It must be one or the other. Whereas in Romans Paul seems to leave open the possibility of a some kind of justification by works (*If Abraham was justified by* 

works...), here he rules out the possibility altogether, saying, "by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified."

If works not only do not, but also cannot justify, the reader is left with only one conclusion: a man is justified by God through faith alone.

Three times in this single verse Paul also emphasizes the object of justifying faith: Jesus Christ. This connects the *Sola* of Faith Alone to the *Sola* of Christ Alone. One cannot deny the former without denying the latter. To include works in justification is to exclude Christ from justification.

This is why Paul accuses the Galatians of "turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ" by attempting to include the work of circumcision in justification, saying that they are "estranged from Christ." He concludes, "for if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain." (Gal. 1:6; 5:4; 2:21) Just as we are declared righteous for Christ's sake alone, so we are declared righteous through faith alone.

#### Galatians 3:10

That no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith.

Paul is citing a verse he used in his epistle to the Romans to establish faith as the universal instrument by which God distributes Christ's salvation to all:

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." (Rom.1:16-17)

Here in Galatians, Paul is making a similar argument about the Gentiles sharing in a common salvation with the descendants of Abraham. He writes:

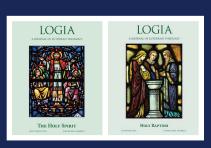
And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. (Gal. 3:8-9)

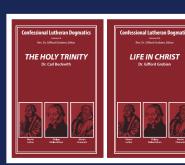


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Paul asserts here that the statement "the just shall live by faith" excludes the possibility of one being justified by works. This leaves faith alone as the only possible means of justification before God for both Jews and Gentiles.

#### Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Paul contrasts the phrase "not of works" with "through faith." Again, the two are exclusive of one another. And even the faith itself which appropriates salvation is a divine gift "not of yourselves," ruling out the possibility that such faith may be seen as a work.

Paul's mention of boasting bears some mention. Already in Romans, Paul has connected boasting to justification by works: "If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God." (Rom. 4:2) A justification by works results in boasting. This helps us understand Paul elsewhere in Romans when he says, "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith." If justification by works results in boasting, justification by faith excludes boasting precisely because justification by faith excludes all works.

This verse is perhaps Paul's clearest and fullest expression of the role of how sinners are justified. It is the source of the classic formula for justification articulated during the Reformation in the Lutheran *Book of Concord:* 

Men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. (AC, VI, 1-3)

This formula is expanded later in the Confessions. Notice how carefully the reformers were to exclude any hint of works from justification:

...that poor sinful man is justified before God, that is, absolved and declared free and exempt from all his sins, and from the sentence of well-deserved condemnation, and adopted into sonship and heirship of eternal life, without any merit or worth of our own, also without any preceding, present, or any subsequent works, out of pure grace, because of the sole merit, complete obedience, bitter suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Christ alone, whose obedience is reckoned to us for righteousness. These treasures are offered us by the Holy Ghost in the promise of the holy Gospel; and faith alone is the only means by which we lay hold upon, accept, and apply, and appropriate them to ourselves. (SD, III, 9-10)

The reformers were at pains to cut off every conceivable avenue by which works could be introduced into justification. And yet, there is nothing in this expanded formula that isn't found in Paul's writings themselves.

And while Paul excludes works of the law entirely from our justification before God, he properly includes works in the life that results from justification through faith alone. The statement (attributed to Martin Luther or John Calvin, depending on whom you ask), "We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone" is true. Works have their place following justification. Paul concludes in verse 10: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

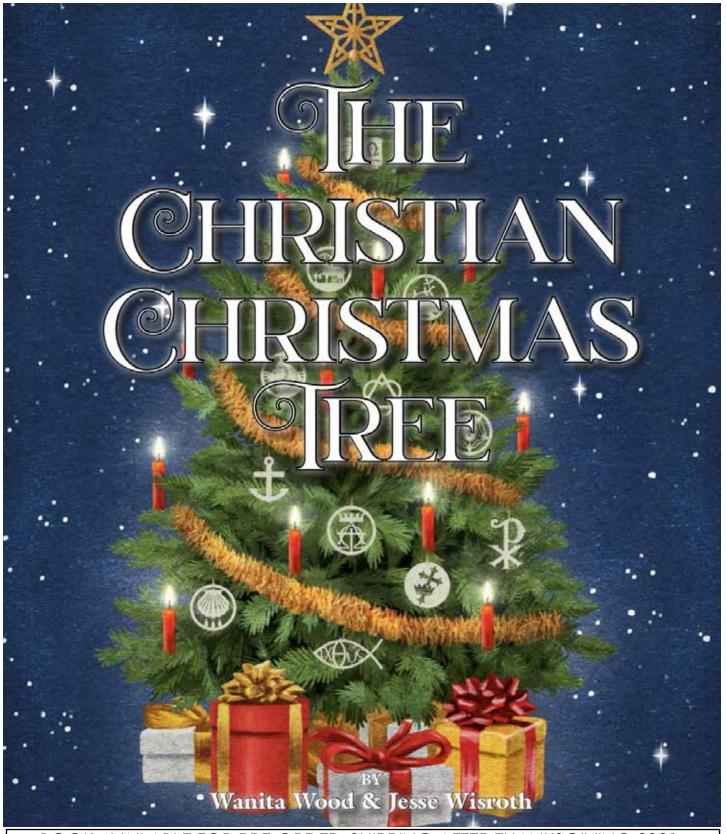
#### Faith Alone... By Any Other Name

It is true that the Apostle Paul does not use the phrase "Faith Alone." He doesn't need to. In fact, in just this small sampling of verses, Paul uses the strongest *possible* language to exclude works from justification: "apart from the deeds of the law...apart from works...not by the works of the law...not of works ...by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified...no one is justified by the law in the sight of God." This is how Paul says, "Faith Alone." It is difficult to imagine what stronger terms Paul could have used to deny a place for works in God's justification of sinners. And since for Paul, faith and works are mutually exclusive as means of justification, excluding works —denying even the

possibility of justifying works— leaves only one possibility: Faith alone justifies. Or as the Lutheran Confessions put it:

We wish first to show this, that faith alone makes of an unjust, a just man, i.e., receives remission of sins. The particle "alone" offends some, although even Paul says, Rom. 3:28: "We conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law." Again, Eph. 2:8: "It is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." Again, Rom. 3:24: "Being justified freely." If the exclusive "alone" displeases, let them remove from Paul also the exclusives freely, not of works, it is the gift, etc. For these also are very strong exclusives. (Ap. VI, 73)





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## Wittenberg Trail: Confessions: My Journey from Roman Catholicism to Confessional Lutheranism

#### by Katey Price Vogel

St. Augustine wrote in his *Confessions* that, "You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." While I did not have quite the spirited past of St. Augustine, I certainly questioned my faith regularly, and ran in and out of my Roman Catholic faith until finding my way to confessional Lutheranism in 2018.

I was raised in Western Pennsylvania as a "cradle Catholic," meaning I was baptized and brought to the Roman Catholic faith from birth. Growing up in a small town, Catholicism was all I knew. I went to Catholic grade school and all my friends attended my parish on Sundays. The families I saw in Mass at 8:30 a.m. were the same families I saw at the swimming pool that Sunday afternoon. It was very idyllic small-town living.

When I went to a large university, my mind was opened to other denominations and Christian worldviews. I was exposed to many different forms of Protestantism and Evangelical Christianity. I regularly went to Catholic Mass at our Newman Center, but there was something missing—something which had been eluding me for a while. I was going to Mass every week, but I wasn't *feeling* anything.

Ever restless, I began attending Campus Crusade for Christ each week—a large gathering of hundreds of students giving their lives for Christ. The music was contemporary with hands flying in the air, and I felt as if I were living two lives: one on Sunday ordered by the ancient hum of the liturgy and the Sacraments, and the other on Thursday as Spirit-filled and wild as the student leader wanted it to be that evening.

In the end, I chose feeling over substance, as I felt "called" to attend an Evangelical law school. I told myself and others that it was because of the constitutional law and religious liberties programs. But the truth is I felt as if the Holy Spirit were leading me to a place where my faith would be opened wide to possibilities.

To the contrary, once exposed to even more Christian denominations, my restless heart dug in to what I knew: Catholicism. For the next 12 years, I became more firmly entrenched in my Catholic faith. I studied Catholic apologetics, joined Bible studies, prayed the rosary as often as I could, did a weekly Holy Hour (praying before the exposed Eucharistic host), and went to Daily Mass several times each week. I knew each saint for every day, for every need. Lost my keys? I prayed to St. Anthony. When I studied for the bar exam, I lit candles nearly every day at a statue of St. Thomas More, the patron saint of lawyers. In short, I was doing everything I could to work my way into heaven. It was all about doing "more," and there was never enough I could do to ensure I would land in heaven. Looking back, I realize that my focus was not on what Jesus did for me but on myself.

I became increasingly worried about my salvation. I was concerned with what purgatory would be like and how long I would have to spend there. I kept wondering if there was some way to know for sure that I would make my way to the pearly gates, but everything from the Catholic Church pointed toward "no". At the same time, I was growing more disillusioned with the papacy and the leadership at the Vatican. Pope Francis took over the papacy from Pope Benedict XVI and immediately began to sideline conservative voices while issuing vague statements on Catholic doctrine and social teaching. He became the darling of the liberal media, especially with the publication of his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si* which blasted capitalism and discussed climate change.

In the summer of 2018, I fell into a spiritual darkness. I was bouncing from one Catholic parish to another, and I was again restless. I questioned whether I had a place in the Catholic Church. I struggled to find conservative orthodox parishes practicing the Novus Ordo—the ordinary rite followed after Vatican II. While spiritually and ideologically I aligned more closely with those Catholics attending Latin Mass

churches, I never felt at home with some of their traditions. I lamented to a good friend —a faithful Lutheran and member at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Alexandria, VA—that I was so upset with the state of the Catholic Church and had no idea where to turn. This friend asked me for my address, and the next day an Amazon package appeared on my front doorstep containing three books: *Luther's Small Catechism*, *Why I am Lutheran* by Daniel Preus, and *The Spirituality of the Cross* by Gene Edward Veith. I thanked my friend for these books, but I assured him that I could never become Lutheran and would find a way to stay in the Catholic Church.

Eventually curiosity got the best of me. I devoured these three books and found that Jesus was central to all that I was reading. I felt like the focus on the Lord and the scriptural basis for everything had been missing in my life. I wanted to know more. In addition to reading these three books, I began to read the Bible more frequently.

One Sunday, I decided to attend the Divine Service at Immanuel in Alexandria. I was nervous driving to church, and wondered what I was possibly doing. I had no idea what I would experience and was shocked to find that the liturgy was not so different from Catholic Mass. I found the sermon to have substance and to connect deeply with the Gospel. I enjoyed the beautiful hymnody which had real depth. While my head kept saying "this is just Catholic-lite", my heart was telling me I just had to come back for another service. I found my way back to Immanuel the following Sunday, and then the next Sunday. At that point, I decided it was time to meet with Immanuel's senior pastor, the Rev. Christopher Esget.

In my first meeting with Pastor Esget, he gave me a copy of *Luther's Large Catechism*, pointed me toward the *Book of Concord* and a book by Robert Preus entitled *Justification and Rome*. I read through the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, and the Smalcald Articles. I read through both the *Large Catechism* and *Justification and Rome*—twice! (My copy of *Justification and Rome* is well-loved with many passages underlined and flagged.) I asked dozens of questions in person and via email. We spoke about the church fathers and their place in confessional Lutheranism. I was still attending Catholic Mass each Sunday as well as Divine Service, but I was falling in love with the doctrine of justification. At one meeting with Pastor Esget, I

asked him if justification was really that simple—that we are saved by grace through faith alone—and he said "yes." It was so different from what I learned attending Catholic grade school and growing up in the Catholic Church. I continued to mull over and pray on the beautiful simplicity of justification, specifically Article IV in the Augsburg Confession.

In the winter of 2019, I decided to start catechetical classes for Confirmation at Immanuel, but was unsure if I would ultimately become Lutheran at Easter. At each successive Sunday class, I became more convicted that the Lutheran Church was the place for me. I loved attending the Divine Service and the juxtaposition of Law and Gospel. But mostly, I longed to receive Communion at the altar rail. Every time I came up for a blessing, I yearned to have Jesus fill me with His Body and Blood. I prayed about becoming Lutheran and eventually decided to tell my family that I was leaving the Roman Catholic Church. Those were difficult but necessary conversations to have. My family was mostly supportive of my decision, with my parents and siblings content that I was remaining a Christian.

On Wednesday of Holy Week, I met with Pastor one final time after going to Confession, and asked final questions regarding saints and Mary. Even though I was 99% sure I would become Lutheran, I just had to close the loop on my upbringing as a Roman Catholic. I left feeling firm in my conviction that the Lutheran Church was home for me.

My journey to confessional Lutheranism culminated with my confirmation at the Easter Vigil in April 2019. As part of the confirmation liturgy, Pastor Esget read these verses for me from Ephesians, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8-10 NKJV) I can think of no better verses to summarize where my focus should be and where I should place my faith and trust in my salvation—in the grace Jesus bought for us. To this day, I often ponder these verses and pray on them in times of need.

My faith today is stronger than before thanks to faithful pastors like Pastors Esget and Noah Rogness at Immanuel and friends from my parish community. In fact, two fellow parishioners introduced me to my now-husband, another Lutheran. We married this past summer, and we support one another in prayer and attend weekly Divine Service together. I am no longer restless in my faith but firmly entrenched in confessional Lutheranism. Like St. Augustine so many centuries ago, I have found my spiritual home.



Katey Price Vogel is the Executive Director of the Terri Schiavo Life & Hope Network and a member at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Alexandria, VA. Her career has been focused at the intersection of policy, politics, and the law. In addition to her work with the Life & Hope Network, she is a Charlotte Lozier Institute Associate Scholar. She is a happy wife, both a proud Buckeye and Yinzer, and an ice cream connoisseur.

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Our Savior Lutheran Rev. Doug Minton 209 W. Jones St. Milford, IL 60953 815-889-4121

Trinity Lutheran
Rev. Peter III
Rev. Todd Wilken
503 E. Washington Street
Millstadt, IL 62260
618-476-3101

Holy Cross Lutheran Rev. Wilfred Karsten 4107 21st Avenue Moline, IL 61265 309-764-9720 Bethany Lutheran Rev. Seth Clemmer Rev. Stephen Schumacher 1550 Modaff Road Naperville, IL 60565 630-355-2198

St. John's Lutheran Rev. David Benning 300 E. Gibson Street New Berlin, IL 62670 217-448-3190

Christ Lutheran Rev. Jonathan Huehn 311 N. Hershey Road Normal, IL 61761 309-452-5609

Zion Lutheran Rev. Donald Pritchard 525 N. Cartwright Pleasant Plains, IL 62677 217-626-1282

St. John Lutheran Rev. Mark Brockhoff 1800 S. Rodenburg Road Schaumburg, IL 60193 847-524-9746

St. John Lutheran Rev. Paul Mumme 26555 Brickville Rd. Sycamore, IL 60178 815-895-4477

Good Shepherd Lutheran Rev. Michael Schuermann 500 South Sherman Blvd Sherman, IL 60193 847-524-9746

#### **INDIANA**

Emanuel Lutheran Rev. Thomas Ludwig 355 Shaffer Street Arcadia, IN 46030 317-984-3651

Grace Lutheran Rev. John Armstrong 3201 Central Avenue Columbus, IN 47203 812-372-4859

Redeemer Lutheran Rev. David Petersen Rev. Michael Frese 202 West Rudisill Blvd. Fort Wayne, IN 46807 260-744-2585 Calvary Lutheran Rev. Kurt Ebert Rev. Josh Reifsteck Rev. Udhayanesan Raji 6111 Shelby Street Indianapolis, IN 46227 317-783-2000

St Paul's Lutheran Rev. David Shadday 3932 Mi Casa Avenue Indianapolis, IN 46237 317-787-4464

St Peter Lutheran Rev. Seth Mierow 2525 E. 11th Street Indianapolis, IN 46201 317-638-7245

St Paul Lutheran Rev. Peter Speckhard Rev. Donald Stock 8601 Harrison Ave. Munster, IN 46321 219-836-6270

St Paul Lutheran Rev. Michael Blodgett 1910 N. Berthaud Rd. New Haven, IN 46774 260-749-5444

Emmaus Lutheran Rev. Dr. Richard Stuckwisch Rev. David Seyboldt 929 E. Milton St. South Bend, IN 46613 574-287-4151

Immanuel Lutheran Rev. Jacob Sutton 645 Poplar St. Terre Haute, IN 47807 812-232-4972

Trinity Lutheran Rev. Jordan McKinley 4413 South State Road 135 Vallonia, IN 47281 812-358-3225

Advent Lutheran Rev. Marcus Mackay Rev. James Grady 11250 N. Michigan Rd Zionsville, IN 46077 317-873-6318

#### **IOWA**

Holy Cross Lutheran Rev. Kevin Johnson 1100 Market Street Carlisle, IA 50047 515-989-3841

Our Redeemer Lutheran Rev. Michael Knox 904 Bluff Street Cedar Falls, IA 50613 319-266-2509

St Paul Lutheran Rev. Nathan Dudley 2463 State Hwy 2 Clarinda, IA 51632 712-542-1505

Zion Lutheran Rev. Jeffrey Keuning 309 Marshall Street P.O. Box 127 Dexter, IA 50070 515-729-2977

Our Redeemer Lutheran Rev. Kristian Kincaid Rev. Jesse Cearlock 2145 John F. Kennedy Road Dubuque, IA 52002 563-588-1247

St Paul Lutheran Rev. John Koopman 805 Harrison St. Emmetsburg IA 50536 712-852-236,7

St. John Lutheran Rev. Don Erickson 5092 480th Street Germantown, IA 51046 712-418-2637

Zion Lutheran Rev Daniel Krueger 201 First Ave Hiawatha IA 52233 319-393-2013

Redeemer Lutheran Rev Alexander Post 1600 S Center St Marshalltown IA 50158 641-753-9565

Immanuel Lutheran Rev. J.R. Wheeler 101 E. View Place Osceola, IA 50213 641-342-3121 Faith Lutheran Rev. David Menet 1555 W. Ridgeway Avenue Waterloo, IA 50701 319-236-1771

#### **KANSAS**

Risen Savior Lutheran Rev. Robert Weinkauf 14700 Leavenworth Road Basehor, KS 66007 913-724-2900

Redeemer Lutheran Rev. Sean Kilgo 2700 Lawrence Ave. Lawrence, KS 66047 785-843-8181

Grace Lutheran Rev. Dale Dumperth 800 E. 1st Street McPherson, KS 67460-3614 620-241-1627

Augsburg Lutheran Rev. J. W. Watson 13902 W. 67th Street Shawnee, KS 66216 913-403-6194

Bethlehem Lutheran Rev. Christopher Craig 308 N. Indiana Avenue Sylvan Grove, KS 67481 785-526-7152

St John's Lutheran Rev. Jon Bruss Rev. D.M. Kerns Rev. Roger Goetz 901 S.W. Fillmore Street Topeka, KS 66606 785-354-7132

Grace Lutheran Church Rev. Geoffrey Boyle Rev. Daniel Metzger 3310 E. Pawnee Street Wichita, KS 67218 316-685-6781

Trinity Lutheran Church Rev. Geoffrey Boyle Rev. Daniel Metzger 611 S. Erie Street Wichita, KS 67211 316-685-1571

#### **KENTUCKY**

Our Redeemer Lutheran Rev. Michael Huebner 2255 Eastland Pkwy Lexington, KY 40505 859-299-9615

Our Savior Lutheran Rev. Joshua Cook 8305 Nottingham Pkwy Louisville, KY 40222 502-426-1130

#### **LOUISIANA**

Redeemer Lutheran Church Rev. John Drosendahl 22531 Hwy 1088 Mandeville, LA 70448 985-674-0377

#### **MARYLAND**

Zion Lutheran Rev. James Oester 219 Cemetery Road Accident, MD 21520 301-746-8170

Calvary Lutheran Rev. Kevin Barron 2625 E. Northern Parkway Baltimore, MD 21214 410-426-4301

St. Paul Lutheran Rev. William Stottlemyer 3738 Resley Road Hancock, MD 21750 301-678-7180

Lutheran Church of the Cross Rev. Christopher Harrison 12801 Falls Rd. Rockville, MD 20854 301-762-7565

#### **MASSACHUSETTS**

First Lutheran Rev. James Hopkins 299 Berkeley Street Boston, MA, 02116 617-536-8851

#### **MICHIGAN**

Grace Lutheran Rev. Aaron Schian 303 W. Ruth Street Auburn, MI 48611 989-662-6161 Redemption Lutheran Rev. Karl Strenge 2450 W. Michigan Ave. Battle Creek, MI 269-964-2321

Ascension of Christ Lutheran Rev. Daniel Grams 16935 W. Fourteen Mile Road Beverly Hills, MI 48025 248-644-8890

St Paul Lutheran of Good Harbor Rev. Robert Wurst Jr 2943 S. Manitou Trail Cedar, MI 49621 231-228-6888

Emmanuel Lutheran Rev. Joel Baseley Rev. Paul Wolff 800 S. Military Street Dearborn, MI 48124 313-565-4002

Zion Lutheran Rev. Mark Braden 4305 Military Street Detroit, MI 48210 313-894-7450

Epiphany Lutheran Rev. Ryan Beffrey 4219 Park Lane Dorr, MI 49323 616-681-0791

Immanuel Lutheran Rev Mark Loest 8220 E Holland Rd (M-46) Frankentrost MI 48601 989-754-0929

Our Savior Lutheran Rev. Jeremy Swem Rev. David Fleming Rev. North Sherrill, Jr. 2900 Burton Street S.E. Grand Rapids, MI 49546 616-949-0710

St. Paul's Lutheran Rev. Lee Johnson Rev. Sean Willman 2551 W. Bacon Rd. Hillsdale, MI 49242 517-437-27625 St. John Lutheran 246 N. Ridge Road Port Sanilac, MI 48469 810-622-9653

St Michael Lutheran Rev. Paul Naumann Rev. Jason Toman 7211 Oakland Dr Portage, MI 49024 269-327-7832

St. John Lutheran Rev. Joshua Ball 62657 North Avenue Ray, MI 48096 586-749-5286

St. Paul Lutheran Rev. Steve Stolarczyk 6356 Center Street Unionville, MI 48767 989-674-8681

#### **MINNESOTA**

Immanuel Lutheran Rev. Donald Klatt 160 210th Street S.W. Appleton, MN 56208 320-394-2358

St. Paul Lutheran Rev. Peter Haugen 128 Filmore Street SE Chatfield, MN 55923 507-867-4604

St. John Lutheran Rev. Matthew Moss Rev. Matthew Johnson 9141 Highway 101 Corcoran, MN 55340 763-420-2426

Mount Olive Lutheran Rev. Robert Franck 2012 E. Superior Street Duluth, MN 55812 218-724-2500

Immanuel Lutheran Rev. Donald Klatt 510 Olivia Street Holloway, MN 56249 320-394-2452

Trinity Lutheran Rev. Donald Klatt 1746 30th Street N.W. Holloway, MN 56249 320-394-2308 St. John's Lutheran Rev. David Markworth 60929 110th Street Hutchinson, MN 55350 320-587-4853

St. Paul Lutheran 1324 9th Street International Falls, MN 56649 218-283-8642

Trinity Lutheran Rev. Gregory Volbrecht 47334 132nd Street Lewisville, MN 56060 507-435-2434

Good Shepherd Lutheran Rev. James Stefanic 1600 E. College Drive Marshall, MN 56258 507-532-4857

Glory of Christ Lutheran Rev. Jeremiah Johnson Rev. Kyle Krueger Rev. John Fehrman Rev. Dean Weibel 4040 Hwy 101 N. Plymouth, MN 55446 763-478-6031

St Johns Lutheran Rev. Christopher Horton 14385 Blaine Avenue E. Rosemount, MN 55068-5929 651-423-2149

Redeemer Lutheran Rev. Bruce Timm 2718 3rd Street N. St Cloud, MN 56303 320-252-8171

#### MISSISSIPPI

Christ Lutheran Rev. Dr.. James Holowach 4423 I-55 North Jackson, MS 39206 601-366-2055

#### **MISSOURI**

Good Shepherd Lutheran Rev. Warren Woerth 2211 Tenbrook Road Arnold, MO 63010 636-296-1292 Lord of Life Lutheran Rev. Mark Below 15750 Baxter Road Chesterfield, MO 63017 636-532-0400

Mount Calvary Lutheran Rev. Mark Kranz 1215 Baldwin Lane Excelsior Springs, MO 64024 816-637-9800

Trinity Lutheran Rev. Rick Pettey 601 Kingsbury Blvd Fredericktown, MO 63645 573-783-2405

Zion Lutheran Rev. Rick Pettey 601 County Road 202 Gravelton, MO 63645 573-783-2405

Village Lutheran Rev. Dr. Kevin Golden Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison 9237 Clayton Road Ladue, MO 63124 314-993-1834

Trinity Lutheran Rev. David Oberdieck 1300 Kent Drive Lebanon, MO 65536 417-532-2717

Trinity Lutheran Rev. James Thomas 4798 N Hwy 94 Saint Charles, MO 63301 636-250-3350

Zion Lutheran Rev. Mark Rouland Rev. Michael Fieberkorn 3866 S. Hwy. 94 Saint Charles, MO 63304 636-441-7425

Hope Lutheran Rev. Randy Asburry 5218 Neosho Saint Louis, MO 63109 314-352-0014

Peace Lutheran Rev. Dr. Jon Furgeson Rev. Robert Brown Rev. Dr. Dennis Kastens 737 Barracksview Road Saint Louis, MO 63125 314-892-5610 Prince of Peace Lutheran Rev. Hans Fiene 8646 New Sappington Road Saint Louis, MO 63126 314-843-8448

Concordia Lutheran Rev. Mark Martin 836 Park Ave. Sikeston, MO 63801 573-471-5842

St. Paul's Lutheran Rev. Steve Riordan 955 Hwy 109 Wildwood, MO 63038 636-273-6239

#### **MONTANA**

St. John Lutheran Rev. Paul Shupe 301 Vail Avenue Belfry, MT 59008 406-662-3776

Christ The King Lutheran Rev. Ryan Wendt 759 Newman Lane Billings, MT 59101-4742 406-252-9250

Mount Olive Lutheran Rev. Willis McCall Rev. Christopher Brandt 2336 St. Johns Ave. Billings, MT 59102 406-656-6687

St. Paul Lutheran Rev. Paul Shupe 404 S. 3rd Street Bridger, MT 59014 406-662-3776

#### **NEBRASKA**

Trinity Lutheran Rev. Jonathan Rathjen 34 Alden Street Auburn, NE 68305 402-274-4210

St Paul Lutheran Rev. Allen Strawn 506 Mail St. Bridgeport ,NE 69336 308-262-0424

Immanuel Lutheran Rev. Scott Porath 1009 G Street Eagle, NE 68347 402-781-2190 Peace Lutheran Rev. Michael Gaunt 906 N. California Avenue Hastings, NE 68901 402-462-9023

Zion Lutheran Rev David Kahle 1305 Broadway Imperial NE 69033 308-882-5655

Good Shepherd Lutheran Rev. Clint Poppe Rev. Adam Moline Rev. Luke Russert 3825 Wildbriar Lane Lincoln, NE 68516 402-423-7639

Redeemer Lutheran Rev. Mark Ebert Rev. Joel Dietrich 510 S. 33rd Street Lincoln, NE 68510 402-477-1710

Lamb of God Lutheran Rev. Philip Houser 1414 South Washington Papillion, NE 68046 402-934-9045

Pacific Hills Lutheran Rev. Bryan Drebes 1110 S. 90th St. Omaha, NE 68124 402-391-9625

Zion Lutheran Rev. Craig Niemeier 1653 Worms Road Saint Libory, NE 68872 308-687-6314

Trinity Lutheran Rev. Kevin Kohnke 5315 S. 162nd Street Walton, NE 68461 402-782-6515

#### **NEVADA**

Grace Lutheran Rev. Anthony DiLiberto 2657 W. Horizon Ridge Pkwy Henderson, NV 89052 702-492-4701

#### **NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Immanuel Lutheran Rev. Donald Colegeo 673 Weston Road Manchester, NH 03103 603-622-1514

#### **NEW MEXICO**

Redeemer Lutheran Rev. Brian Kachelmeier 2000 Diamond Drive Los Alamos, NM 87544 505-412-9682

#### **NEW YORK**

Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer Rev. William Terjesen 714 Hudson Avenue Peekskill, NY 10566 914-293-0081

Zion Lutheran Rev. Timmothy Heath 3917 Waverly Rd. Owego, NY 13827 607-687-1205

#### **NORTH CAROLINA**

Our Redeemer Lutheran Rev. Tod Rappe 1605 Van Buren Avenue Fayetteville, NC 28303 910-488-6010

Trinity Lutheran Rev. Thomas Olson 3353 US 176 North Tryon, NC 28782 828-859-0379

#### **NORTH DAKOTA**

Zion Lutheran Rev. Aaron Filipek 420 1st Street S.E. Gwinner SD 58040 701-678-2401

#### OHIO

Mount Olive Lutheran Rev. Jonathan McCall 4000 Wallings Road, North Royalton, OH 44133 216-381-2873 Zion Evangelical Lutheran Rev. Wesley Hromowyk 766 S. High Street Columbus, OH 43206 614-444-3456

Bethlehem Lutheran Rev. Keith Witte 1240 S. Maple Avenue Fairborn, OH 45324 937-878-0651

St. Timothy Lutheran Rev Joel Sutton 5040 Rye Dr Huber Heights OH 45424 937-233-2443

St. John Lutheran Rev. Stephen Niermann 16035 Country Rd. U Napoleon, OH 43545 419-598-8961

Bethlehem Lutheran Rev. Robert Green 7500 State Road Parma, OH 44134 440-845-2230

Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Rev. John Rutz 13101 Five Point Road Perrysburg, OH 43551 419-874-6939

St. John Lutheran Rev. James Haugen 8888 Prospect Road Strongville, OH 44136 440-234-5806

Hope Lutheran Rev. Benjamin Meyer 15370 Meredith State Road Sunbury, OH 43074 740-965-1685

Good Shepherd Lutheran Rev. Brad Scott 3934 W. Laskey Rd. Toledo, OH 44623 419-474-0529

#### **OKLAHOMA**

Zion Lutheran Rev. Ron Christie 7701 W. Britton Rd. Oklahoma City, OK 73132 405-722-7472 Eirst Lutheran Rev. Joseph Highly 1101 N. 4th St. Ponca City, OK 774601 580-762-1111

Trinity Lutheran Rev. Christian Tiews 1314 E. 6th Street Okmulgee, OK 74447 918-756-6046

#### **OREGON**

Holy Cross Lutheran Rev. Alexander Lange 2515 Queen Avenue S.E. Albany, OR 97322 541-928-0214

Redeemer Lutheran Rev. Eric Lange 795 E. Powell Blvd Gresham, OR 97030 503-665-5414

Reformation Lutheran (ELS) Rev. Steven Brockdorf 4435 S.E. Tualatin Valley Hwy Hillsboro, OR 97123 503-648-1393

Emmaus Lutheran Rev. Karl Hess 2175 SW Salmon Ave. Redmond, OR 97756 541-508-1927

Faith Lutheran Rev. Evan Goeglein 8582 Rogue River Hwy. Rogue River, OR 97537 541-582-0457

#### **PENNSYLVANIA**

Mt. Calvary Lutheran Rev. Christopher Seifferlein 308 Petersburg Road Lititz, PA 17543 717-560-6751

Logos Lutheran Rev. Rob Kieselowsky 628 N. Broad Street Philadelphia, PA 19130 215-992-9102

St. John Lutheran Rev. Robert Kieselowsky 25 E. Scenic Road Springfield, PA 19064 610-543-3100

#### SOUTH CAROLINA

Our Redeemer Lutheran Rev Aaron Stinnett 54 Dedar Swamp Rd Smithfield RI 02917 401-232-7575

#### **SOUTH CAROLINA**

Holy Trinity Lutheran Rev. Christopher Burger 2200 Lee St. Columbia, SC 29205 803-799-7224

#### **SOUTH DAKOTA**

Mount Calvary Lutheran Rev. Matthew Wurm 629 9th Avenue Brookings, SD 57006 605-692-2678

Peace Lutheran Rev. David Lindenberg 219 E. Saint Anne St. Rapid City, SD 57701 605-721-6480

Christ Lutheran Rev. Matthew Nix 4801 E. 6th Street Sioux Falls, SD 57110 605-338-3769

#### **TENNESSEE**

Grace Lutheran Rev. Larry Peters Rev. Daniel Ulrich 2041 Madison Street Clarksville, TN 37043 931-647-6750

Concordia Lutheran Rev. Eric Rudsenske 637 Wallace Rd. Jackson, TN 38305 731-668-0757

Praise Lutheran Rev. Derek Roberts 1850 Big Springs Rd. Maryville, TN 37801 865-977-5810

Redeemer Lutheran Rev. Philip Young 800 Bellevue Road Nashville, TN 37221-2702 615-646-3150 St. Paul Lutheran Rev. Robert Portier 1610 Pullen Road Sevierville, TN 37862 865-365-8551

#### **TEXAS**

St Paul Lutheran Rev. Bryan Wolfmueller 3501 Red River Street Austin, TX 78705 512-472-8301

Bethel Lutheran Rev. Thomas Baden 1701 N. Broadway Ballinger, TX 76821 325-942-9275

Divine Savior Lutheran Church Rev. Randall Wehmeyer 405 Ingram Road Devine, Texas 78016 830-663-3735

Grace Lutheran Rev. Carl Roth 801 W. 11th Street Elgin, TX 78621 512-281-3367

Mount Calvary Lutheran Rev. Thomas Baden 12358 Country Road 5500 Eola, TX 76937 325-942-9275

Immanuel Lutheran Rev. Tab Ottmers 301 Country Club Road Fairview, TX 75069 972-540-1036

Redeemer Lutheran Rev. David Grassley 4513 Williams Road Fort Worth, TX 76116 817-560-0030

Resurrection Lutheran Rev Garrett Buvinghausen 2215 N Llano Fredericksburg TX 78624 830-997-9408

Holy Shepherd Lutheran Rev. Christopher Bramich 1500 FM 156 S Haslet, TX 76052 817-439-2100 Memorial Lutheran.
Rev. Dr. Scott Murray
Rev. Sagar Pilli
Rev. Dr. Christopher Ahlman
Rev. Ian Pacey
Rev. Robert Paul
5800 Westheimer
Houston, TX 77057
713-782-6079

Our Savior Lutheran Rev Dr Laurence White Rev Kelly Krieg 5000 West Tidwell Houston TX 77091 713-290-9087

Messiah Lutheran Rev. Tom Chryst 1308 Whitley Road Keller, TX 76248 817-431-2345

Pilgrim Lutheran Rev. Dr. Jayson Galler 713 Florey Street Kilgore, TX 75662 903-984-4333

Bethlehem Lutheran Rev. Randall Smith 5084 Church Lane North Zulch, TX 77872 936-399-5563

Faith Lutheran Rev. Thomas Baden 801 1st Street Ozona, TX 76943 325-942-9275

Zion Lutheran Rev Michael Erickson 1200 Duncan St Pampa TX 79065 806-669-2774

Faith Lutheran Rev. James Woelmer Rev. Robert Hill Rev. Mark Taylor Rev. Steve Kieser Rev. Kurt Ulmer 1701 E. Park Blvd Plano, TX 75074 972-423-7447

Lord of Life Lutheran Rev. Joel Shaltanis 3601 W. 15th Street Plano, TX 75075 972-867-5588 Trinity Lutheran Rev. Allan Eckert 3536 Lutheran Way San Angelo, TX 76904 325-944-8660

Mount Calvary Lutheran Rev. Harrison Goodman Rev. Craig Meissler 308 Mount Calvary Dr. San Antonio, TX 78209 210-824-8748

Hope Lutheran Rev. Thomas Baden 417 E. 2nd Street Sonora, TX 76950 325-942-9275

St Mark Lutheran Rev. Peter Kolb 2000 Clay Avenue Waco, TX 76706 254-754-0644

#### **VIRGINIA**

Immanuel Lutheran Rev. Christopher Esget Rev. Peter Eckardt 1801 Russell Road Alexandria, VA 22301 703-549-0155

Hope Lutheran (AALC) Rev. Nigel Brown 1112 Todds Ln. Hampton, VA 23666 757-849-2167

St. Athanasius Lutheran Rev. James Douthwaite 114 Kingsley Road S.W. Vienna, VA 22180 703-455-4003

Our Savior Lutheran Rev. Gregory Cumbee 2800 Millwood Pike Winchester, VA 22602 540-667-1459

#### WASHINGTON

Peace Lutheran Rev. Daniel Freeman Rev. Larry Bergman 2071 Bishop Road Chehalis, WA 98532 360-748-4108 Immanuel Lutheran Rev. Kyle Heck 2531 Lombard Avenue Everett, WA 98201 425-252-7038

Messiah Lutheran Rev. Kurt Onken 9209 State Avenue Marysville, WA 98270 360-659-4112

Beautiful Savior Lutheran Rev. Samuel Schuldheisz 2306 Milton Way Milton, WA 98354 253-922-6977

Messiah Lutheran 7050 35th Avenue N.E. Seattle, WA 98115-5917 206-524-0024

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Rev. Kerry Reese Rev. Warrens Berger 9225 212th Street S.E. Snohomish, WA 98296 360-668-7881

Beautiful Savior Lutheran Rev. Ryan Tinetti 4320 S. Conklin Street Spokane, WA 99203 509-747-6806

Hope Lutheran Rev. Craig Wulf 17909 E. Broadway Avenue Spokane Valley, WA 99016 509-924-1630

Zion Lutheran Rev. Jeffrey Ries 3410 Sixth Avenue Tacoma, WA 98406 253-752-1264

#### **WEST VIGINIA**

St Paul Lutheran Rev. Daniel Golden 3500 Broad St. Parkersburg, WV 26104 304-428-5826

#### WISCONSIN

St. John's Lutheran Rev. Christopher Jackson E 5221 Church Road Algoma, WI 54201 920-487-2335 St. Peter's Lutheran Rev. Christopher Amen 303 Park Street Arlington, WI 53911 608-635-4825

Zion Lutheran Rev. Tim Jones 110 E Grand Avenue Chippewa Falls, WI 54729 715-723-6380

St. Peter Lutheran Rev. Shawn Andersen 275 S. 3rd St. Dorchester, WI 54425 715-654-5055

Elm Grove Lutheran Rev. Eric Skovgaard Rev. Aaron Reseburg 945 Terrace Dr. Elm Grove, WI 53122 262-797-2970

St. John Lutheran Rev. Marshall Frisque 824 Fredonia Ave. Fredonia, WI 53021 262-692-2734

Mount Zion Lutheran Rev. Aaron Koch 3820 W. Layton Avenue Greenfield, WI 53221 414-282-4900

Messiah Lutheran Rev. James Roemke 2026 22nd Avenue Kenosha, WI 53140 262-551-8182

Mount Olive Lutheran Rev. Jason Zobel Rev. Dan Anderson 110 N. Whitney Way Madison, WI 53705 608-238-5656

Faith Lutheran Church and Preschool Rev. Michael Mathey 4009 Irving Street Marinette, WI 54143 715-735-6506

St. John Lutheran Rev. Bruce Zagel 450 Bridge Street Mayville, WI 53050 920-387-3568 Trinity Lutheran Rev. Matthew Peters 1046 N. 9th Street Milwaukee WI 53233 414-271-2219

St. John Lutheran Rev. Mark Eckert N683 County Road S New Fane (Kewaskum), WI 53040 262-626-2309

St. John's Lutheran Rev. Jacob Gilbert Rev. Dan Feldscher 510 Kewaunee Street Racine, WI 53402 262-637-7011

Luther Memorial Chapel and University Student Center Rev. Michael Larson 3833 N. Maryland Avenue Shorewood, WI 53211 414-332-5732

Peace Lutheran Rev. Peter Bender Rev. Gary Gehlbach W240 N6145 Maple Avenue Sussex, WI 53089 262-246-3200

#### WYOMING

Emmanuel Lutheran Rev. James Martin 901 Trona Dr. Green River, WY 82935 307-875-2598

Redeemer Lutheran Rev. David Bott 175 N. Willow Street Jackson, WY 83001 307-733-3409

Trinity Lutheran Rev James Martin 3101 College Dr Rock Springs WY 82935 307-362-5088

Immanuel Lutheran Rev Paul Cain Rev Rene Castillero 1300 W 5th St Sheridan WY 82801 307-674-6434

#### **CANADA**

Bethel Lutheran Rev. Jamie Bosma 264 Wilson Street Thunder Bay ON P7B1M9 807-344-8322

Resurrection Lutheran Rev. Nathan Fuehrer 1011 4 Ave. S. Lethbridge, AB, CA TIJOP7 403-915-4336



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Studio Line: (877) 623-MYIE
Comment Line: (618) 223-8382
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