

## A Brief History of the Lutheran Church

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by John Hines

**T**he Lutheran denomination can trace its roots to October 31st, 1517. The Roman Catholic church was engaged in the selling of indulgences to help pay for the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Many saw indulgences as effectively selling the forgiveness of sins. They were, "a way to reduce the amount of punishment one has to undergo for sins." While the idea was certainly popular from a marketing standpoint, many saw it as nothing but covetousness and greed by the church. Amongst them was a Catholic priest of the Sulpician order named Martin Luther.

**Martin Luther** (1493-1546) began to protest, hence **Protestantism**, the Catholic church. It is important to understand that he was not trying to start a "new" church. He was trying to reform the Catholic church. This is why the Protestant religions are classified as being a part of the "reformation." Regardless of his intent, his actions would lead to a breakaway from the Catholic church.

On the aforementioned October 31st of 1517, Luther brought his protest to the church. He nailed his 95 theses, written in Latin rather than German, condemning the actions of the Pope and the Catholic church to the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany. This was the location where notices were posted and the subject of academic debates were displayed. It was effectively the church's public notice board. He put his theses there for the day of the year when the largest gathering would take place, All Saints' Day.

**In the three upcoming years** after Luther's actions, the Catholic church would try to persuade Luther to recant his positions through various envoys. In 1518 friends of Luther would translate his positions into the common language of the people and make them readily available. They would circulate quickly throughout Europe. In 1520 a papal edict, called a bull, warned Luther that if he did not recant his positions he risked excommunication. Luther refused, publicly setting fire to the edicts on December 10th, 1520 in Wittenberg. Luther was excommunicated by Pope Leo X on January 3, 1521.

**Luther's popularity** had done nothing but grow with many though and he had developed his own following. In contrast with the Catholic sale of indulgences where works salvation was being taught, "As soon as a coin in the coffer ring, a soul from purgatory springs", Luther adamantly held to a "Faith only" salvation. He published his German translation of the New Testament in 1522, being somewhat criticized for adding the word "alone" in Romans 3:28. He would argue that it would remain and the "faith only" doctrine grew.

**In the 1520's the Lutheran church** would come into being. While he preferred the churches be autonomous, that became unfeasible to him. From 1525 to 1527 a supervisory church body would be established with new forms of worship laid down. Today it is comprised of around 80 million people.

**While Luther had many admirable qualities**, the denomination bearing his name is not the church of the Bible. His faith-only stance was and is unscriptural (**James 2:20**). It has been said that the Protestants ran so fast away from Rome that they ran right by Jerusalem, namely the church as it began in the Bible itself. Luther would usher in the protestant denominations.

— via 25th St. Church of Christ bulletin  
Columbus, Indiana

361603