

This Is Our Story

The proclamation of the 95 Theses by Martin Luther in 1517 is considered the beginning of the Reformation. It restored the Gospel to the church: **a sinner is saved solely by Christ through His death and resurrection, through God's grace, and through faith.**

In Poland, many tried to stop the spread of the Reformation. In 1520, King Sigismund I the Old issued a ban on bringing Luther's writings to Poland, with a punishment of property confiscation and exile, and in a statute issued in 1526 he threatened the death penalty for apostasy from Catholicism. During that time, however, clergymen and scholars began to give public speeches conveying Lutheran doctrine. In 1552, two Protestant pastors, Rev. Grzegorz Paweł of Brzeziny and Rev. Stanisław Sarnicki, conducted the first Protestant services in a home in Wola Justowska and Chełm, near Kraków, and in the following years in Kraków itself.

On 17 May 1557, the first public service was held in Kraków – in the garden of Jan Boner, behind the Nicholas Gate (Brama Mikołajska). It was led by Grzegorz Paweł from Brzeziny, the first pastor of the congregation in Kraków. The first Lutheran prints and books were published in Kraków – the Catechism in early 1543, followed by Mikołaj Rej's Postylla. Several more facts from the history of Lutheranism in Kraków in the 16th century are worth noting: the establishment of a Lutheran grammar school by Krzysztof Treacy (1564), the founding

of a cemetery (1569), and efforts to build a church. In 1571, a Lutheran church was established on Saint John's Street (ul. św. Jana). The following year, King Zygmunt August issued a privilege guaranteeing Protestants in Kraków the right to hold public services without hindrance from anyone. Unfortunately, the atmosphere in Polish society at that time was far from tolerant. During the Feast of the Ascension of Jesus Christ in 1591, a fanatical mob attacked the church for the third time (it had previously happened in 1574 and 1587) and this time destroyed it completely.

From 1557 to 1591, the Lutheran congregation's nearly underground life came to an end, and it was forced to exist completely in exile (until 1790). The destroyed church was never rebuilt. Services were held in Aleksandrowice, near Kraków. After repeated attacks on the congregation there, Protestants from Kraków attended services in the village of Wielkanoc, near Miechów, and in Łuczanowice. This continued until the 18th century. In Kraków, services were occasionally conducted in private homes, as well as in the rented Church of Saint Scholastica. For a short time, Protestants enjoyed the freedom to conduct services and funerals in Kraków. In 1656,

the church in Wielkanoc was destroyed twice, first by the Swedes and then by Poles who were hostile towards Lutherans.

The third period in the existence of the Lutheran congregation in Kraków began at the end of the 18th century and has lasted until the present day. From 1790 to 1816, the Kraków congregation held services in a wooden Protestant church in Podgórze, now a district of Kraków.

On 27 July 1816, the senate of the Free City of Kraków gave to the Lutheran congregation the Church of Saint Martin and its adjoining convent on Grodzka Street, which had not been used for 30 years. The Lutheran community faced the challenge of organising its spiritual life while simultaneously renovating the church and developing the adjacent site. In 1826, classes began in the parish school based on an educational programme developed by Jerzy Samuel Bandtki, a member of the congregation and professor at the Jagiellonian University. This school continued to operate until November 1939.

The Women's Association, founded in 1902, ran a hostel for poor and unemployed women. The Lutheran congregation was active in the movement for women's equality. The church in Kraków was the first church in Poland to have women on the Parish Council (church elders). This happened in 1927,

when Helena Gebhardtowa, Wanda Bobkowska and Ella Grosse became members of the council.

During the Second World War, Poles of the Lutheran faith gathered for services at the Saint Agnes Church on Dietla Street. After the Nazi occupation, the Church of Saint Martin was reclaimed, and the first post-war service was held there on 25 January 1945. This marked the beginning of a new period in the recent history of our church, which was also not an easy one.

Under communism, the state took over the parish buildings, severely limiting our church's ability to operate. However, the congregation managed to overcome these difficulties. Despite the complicated political and economic situation, it strove to bring the Gospel to the residents of Kraków and the surrounding towns. After the fall of communism, the parish was given back its property in the early 1990s and began a process of finding a path for itself in the new reality.

It is interesting to note that the Lutheran church in Kraków has always been bi-denominational, openly combining elements of both currents of the Reformation – Evangelical Lutheran and Evangelical Reformed.



LUTHERANS IN KRAKÓW

Who are we? What do we do? How do we serve?

Our parish has been in Kraków officially since 1557. However, the presence of Lutheranism in this city stretches back even further, since the writings of the Reformers very quickly found their way to Kraków, which was the capital of Poland at that time. Although we are steeped in tradition, this doesn't limit our activities. We strive to be a lively, dynamic, and welcoming community of Christians who spread the Gospel in various ways.

We belong to the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, the largest Protestant congregation in our country. It is a founding member of the Lutheran World Federation. We are proud to be hosting the [13th General Assembly of the LWF](#) in Kraków in 2023, during which we will welcome representatives of 149 Lutheran churches from nearly 100 countries.

We strive to make use of the gifts God has given us for the benefit of other people. We fulfil our service in our daily lives, aware that each of us is both sinful and redeemed by God's grace. This is a source of joy in life.

Our church's doctrine is summarised in four key statements:

Christ alone
Grace alone
Faith alone
Scripture alone

Our services and meetings are open to everyone. Details can be found below.

Sunday services:

- **Wieliczka – 8 a.m.**
- **Kraków – 10 a.m.**
(after the service we invite you to join us for refreshments in our social space – the entrance is through the building at 62 Grodzka Street)
- **Kraków – 7 p.m.**
(service with a simplified liturgical order)
- during each Sunday morning service at 10 a.m., the children attend our [Sunday School](#). They meet in three age groups, one of which is led with the Godly Play method.
- once a month (usually the second Sunday of the month) we have an additional [family service](#) at 12 p.m.
- once a month (always the first Sunday of the month) we have [a service in English](#) at 5 p.m.

Daily Activities

There are also many activities during the week:

- Parish Choir
- Children's Choir
- Senior Citizens' Club
- Bible Hour
- Encounters with Faith
(for people interested in our church)
- Youth Group
- University Student Group
- Prayer and Meditation Circle
- Theological Discussion Circle

- **DDN Weekend** (events for children)
- **Protestant religion classes for children from various schools** (including an international class in English)

The parish provides extensive [charitable assistance](#) through its deaconry, funding the purchase of medicine, hygiene products and food.

There is also [a scholarship fund](#) (academic and social) available for children and youths.

Since nearly the beginning of the war in Ukraine, we have been running [an accommodation centre](#) that has hosted 100 people so far. We provide accommodation, food, and legal and medical assistance.

We believe that the church is comprised of people who are brought together to build a spiritual space and share responsibility for it. For this reason, our parish is administered collectively. The Parish Council, the Audit Committee and the Parish Congregation have specific areas of responsibility that ensure a healthy balance between the various bodies. The pastor and the members of the Parish Council and Audit Committee are democratically elected by the entire Parish Congregation.

A Latin maxim is above the entrance to our church: **"FRUSTRA VIVIT QUI NEMINI PRODEST"** ("He who does good deeds for no one lives in vain")

A Few Words about the Church

The Church of Saint Martin, which was originally founded for the Discalced Carmelites, was designed by Giovanni Trevano in the early Baroque style and constructed next to a convent in 1637-40. The new church stood on the site of a previous church, the foundations of which most likely date back to the 12th century. In 1786, by order of the ecclesiastical authorities, the congregation was moved to a monastery on Copernicus Street (ul. Kopernika).

Through the efforts of Professor Jerzy Samuel Bandtki, the abandoned church was presented by the senate of the Free City of Kraków to the Lutheran parish on 27 July 1816. This was in compensation for the harm that had been inflicted on the Lutheran community and the destruction of its church on Saint John's Street in the 16th century.

The neoclassical altar in the Church of Saint Martin, featuring sculptures of the four evangelists, dates from 1870. The altar's focal point is a painting titled "Christ Calming the Storm" by Henryk Siemiradzki. Above the altar is the oldest crucifix in Kraków, dating from about 1370. Behind the crucifix is a stained-glass window from the interwar period, designed by Adam Ciompa, which depicts the fall into original sin on the lefthand side and, on the righthand side, the descent of the Holy Spirit.

During services, the congregation sings from the hymnal, with each hymn's number displayed on wooden boards affixed to the church's walls. The church has a baptismal font decorated with a sculpture depicting Jesus's baptism in the Jordan River. An integral part of every Lutheran church is the pulpit, from which sermons are delivered.

If you have any questions we invite you to contact us!

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