

**WORSHIP GUIDELINES
FOR PASTORS, CONGREGATIONS, AND MINISTRIES
SYNOD OF ALBERTA & THE TERRITORIES, ELCIC**

INTRODUCTION:

As we enter a new century, and as the secularization of our society increases, we witness a growing diversity of worship practices within our churches. This is an exciting and healthy development. Liturgy is necessarily a user of cultural materials and participates in its host culture. Liturgy has few materials that are independent of culture. Over the centuries, Christian liturgy has been culturally versatile, borrowing and creating in many host cultures. Whether borrowed from outside the Christian faith, or created within the culture of the Church, there are more liturgical and musical resources available to congregations and pastors today than at any other time in the history of the Church

However, liturgy is not merely the creature of culture. The gospel is presented in the idiom of every culture. Yet, anchored as it is in time and place, it is also in tension with every culture in which it is presented. Christian worship must never be captive to any culture, nor is it accountable to culture. There are symbols, ritual, gestures, and styles which are trans-cultural, and are of the essence of the Christian faith over and above each culture.

We sense a growing ambiguity and uncertainty in our time over what constitutes appropriate and proper worship in the Lutheran Church, about what makes up the essential core of our worship tradition, and about how to enrich this core without becoming so merged into the surrounding culture, that we lose the distinctive voice of the Gospel.

Some resources and practices promoted today within and outside the Church, have drawn pastors and congregations away from the confessional, ecumenical, and “catholic” consensus of Lutheran worship. There IS room for diversity. There is also a broad consensus identified by our scholars, teachers, historians, and others, who are sensitive to what is wholesome, biblical, confessional, complete, and nurturing to our people.

The purpose of this document is to help congregations and pastors recognize this central core of our Lutheran worship tradition, as it has been in the past, as it is still being renewed within the ecumenical consensus of today's liturgical movement, as expressed by the liturgical churches of the Conservative Reformation within the rites of the Western Church. We encourage you to study these guidelines, discuss them with those in your congregation or place of worship who plan and lead worship, and to adopt them as you are willing and able.

CORE ASSUMPTIONS REGARDING LUTHERAN WORSHIP;

1. Lutherans have always tried to understand worship as something which all worshipers participate in and do, rather than simply to observe as spectators. Unlike entertainment, which we normally receive in a passive state, worship is a participatory activity. Recall that the word LITURGY in its original sense means "the work of the people"
2. Our worship is fundamentally trinitarian, and recognizes that God is revealed to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At the heart of our public worship is the proclamation of the Good News, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is the purpose of our worship to share the Word of God, which is Jesus Christ, and his redeeming activity in our lives, through the power of the Holy Spirit..
3. The public worship of the Church will normally be understood from a perspective of CELEBRATION. Various seasons of the Church Year, such as Lent and Advent, and special days such as Good Friday and the occasion of a funeral, will have a more penitential and somber attitude. But Easter, the day of Christ's Resurrection, is the central festival of the Christian year, and the Easter attitude of joy will permeate the entire worship of the Church.
4. Worship is ultimately directed outward, towards the Christian person's mission within the world, and not inward, toward the believer's own inner satisfaction and pleasure. This does not exclude times of contemplation, introspection and self-examination, such as occur at the confession of sin and our personal response to Scripture and preaching. It reminds us that God calls us in to the house of faith to worship, but then sends us back into the world to serve in peace.

5. Lutheran churches are not separated from the whole body of Christ, the apostolic tradition handed down from generation to generation since the time of Jesus. We see ourselves as a part of the western Christian tradition. This is a liturgical tradition. This means that Lutheran worship normally adheres to a liturgical structure, which arises from the worship of ancient Israel and of the early apostolic church.
6. It is normal for congregations of the Synod to use official Lutheran worship publications as the principal worship resources for their services of worship. (For example, Lutheran Book of Worship, Service Book and Hymnal, With Once Voice, This Far by Faith, Worship & Praise)
7. It is recommended that, according to the ancient tradition of the Church, and the Augsburg Confession Article XXIV, the principal worship service in our congregations on the Lord's Day be a service of Holy Communion, which uses a recognized and authorized Lutheran liturgy. Some of our churches have strayed from this original Christian pattern of worship. This will assure that all who gather in our churches to worship are offered the comfort and consolation of God, offered through the Lord's Supper.
8. This Liturgy of the Eucharist is flexible and adaptable to local circumstances and customs. However, it is encouraged that the four principal parts of the rite be identified and included in public worship, that God's grace might be fully shared. These four parts are ...
 1. GATHERING RITE OR SONG(S)
 2. PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD
 3. SHARING THE SACRAMENTAL MEAL
 4. SENDING/BLESSING(Note: The introduction to the worship supplement, "WITH ONE VOICE" , pp. 8-9, gives an excellent description of the adaptability and flexibility of the liturgy of Holy Communion.)

9. The primary symbol of our belonging to the community of God is the baptismal font. It is good for the font to be located in a prominent and permanent place in the church building, perhaps at the doorway to the church, perhaps at the front and centre, so that the faithful will always pass the font as they enter the church building or come forward to commune. The richness of the symbol can be enhanced by keeping water in the font at all times. Many of our churches now recognize too, that a large baptismal bowl which holds a generous amount of water, enhances the symbolic meaning of baptism as a bath.
10. The use of a loaf of bread and large chalice of wine enhances and makes richer the meaning of Holy Communion as a sacramental meal. When bread wafers are used, the use of a large wafer which can be broken and distributed, makes the sacramental symbolism richer. Where individual communion glasses are used, the sacrament will be more meaningful if they are not pre-filled, but if the wine is administered at the time of reception from a chalice with a pouring lip. The practice of intinction (dipping the bread in the chalice) is an acceptable way of receiving the wine. It is especially thoughtful when used by persons with communicable infections, out of deference to other communicants.
11. Bread and wine which have been consecrated are normally consumed on the day on which the sacrament is celebrated. They may be consumed by the Pastor, assisting ministers, and other communicants, or disposed of by being placed or poured into the earth. Baptismal water and communion wine are never disposed of by pouring down a sink into a public sewer
12. The Prayers of the Faithful, a time for public intercession, should be included in the weekly worship of the Church, no matter what other prayers may be offered. This is an opportunity for the faithful to add their voices to the public prayers for church, community, and world.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES:

13. Congregations are encouraged to follow the seasons and festivals of the Church Year, and dress their houses of worship with the appropriate colours. This needs to take precedence over the colours and decorations of the secular calendar, with its civic, historical, and social festivals and commemorations, in order to give the people of God a trans-cultural and biblical perspective on the daily and annual flow of life.
14. Pastors and other worship leaders are encouraged to vest in the appropriate garments of the historic church. This may include the traditional and ecumenical vestments of alb, stole and chasuble, or the more recent cassock, surplice, and stole for pastors. Lay assistants are also encouraged to vest in the foundational liturgical garment, the ALB. This is a sign of liturgical service to God, and also symbolic of our baptism, in which we are “washed white” in the waters of life. Vestments representing other realms of service, such as the academic gown and hood, are discouraged, as these symbolize a different spiritual realm than that of the people of God.
15. Congregations are invited to adopt and follow an approved lectionary of readings from Scripture, for their proclamation of the Word of God at worship on the Lord’s Day. This ensures that the people of God will hear readings from the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Gospels, as part of their regular spiritual nourishment at worship.
16. Pastors are encouraged to base and centre their regular preaching on the lessons and themes of the lectionary. This does not preclude the occasional departure from lectionary preaching, nor series’ of sermons on special themes. But it tries to ensure that in the course of the year, the people of God receive a full and balanced explication of Holy Scripture, and not simply the personal choices of the preacher.
17. It is recommended that congregations and ministries make liberal use of lay assistants in worship. As was the case in the early church, our liturgies today allow for the participation of lectors (readers), acolytes, ushers, greeters, assisting ministers, servers, candle-bearers, banner-bearers, crucifers, altar guild assistants, choristers, presenters, and instrumentalists of all ages.. Our worship is meant to be shared, and not conducted by one person alone.

18. Congregations and worship leaders are encouraged to use language which is inclusive with regard to gender. It is no longer appropriate to use male pronouns and references when speaking about or to all the members of God's family.
19. Congregations are encouraged to include ministry to, with, and of children when planning and presenting their corporate worship. Our Rite of Holy Baptism admonishes parents and sponsors to bring the baptized to the public worship of God. It is important, then, clearly to address our children in worship with music and language, symbol and actions, light and colour, appropriate to their ages.
20. In their choice of public song, congregations are urged to sing hymns and songs from all periods of the Church's history. To choose exclusively traditional, or exclusively contemporary songs, is to present to God's people only a small part of the music and poetry of the Church. Moreover, worship music ought never to be chosen for its entertainment value, but as a reinforcement and enhancement of the Word of God. In our music, TEXT takes first priority. Our musicians and worship leaders will try to ensure that music and text enhance and support the proclamation of the Word of God.
21. Pastors are encouraged to preside at worship facing toward the people of God rather than facing away from the people. This was the position favoured by Martin Luther, (Luther's Works, American Edition, Vol.53 p.69) and was typical also within the early Church. It continues to be the most appropriate and hospitable way to lead worship. This will mean that, where possible, the Table will be freestanding, so that the Pastor may stand behind it during the appropriate parts of the Liturgy.
22. It is becoming more common that Holy Communion be taken to the homes of the sick and infirm in the congregation by the Pastor or other ministers. This is a rich and vivid way to celebrate the oneness of all God's household, present or absent.
23. The use of instrumental music to accompany the peoples' song is encouraged. For most congregations, the organ, with its ability to project a sustained tone, will continue to be the principal instrument to accompany the music of worship. However, the use of other instruments, such as brass, strings, and percussion, enhances and makes richer the song of the people, and gives further opportunity to utilize the gifts of the people of God.

24. The use of visual art in worship is encouraged. When placed appropriately, banners, drapery, processional crosses, etc., can enrich and enhance the experience of worship.
25. The use of gesture, posture, and motion in worship, can be used to broaden our total response to God's Word in worship. Gestures and motions such as kneeling for confession and prayer, the sign of the cross on the breast and forehead, processions through and around the church building, the exchange of peace, and so on, are encouraged as ways of involving the whole person in the actions of worship.
26. Pastors and congregations are invited and encouraged to study and use the various Occasional Services prepared by our church and made available through the BOOK OF OCCASIONAL SERVICES. These include Anniversary of a Baptism, Anniversary of a Marriage, Affirmation of Marriage Vows, Individual Confession and Forgiveness, Service of the Word for Healing, Laying on of Hands and Anointing the Sick, Commendation of the Dying, Comforting the Bereaved, Recognition of Ministries in a Congregation, Affirmation of the Vocation of Christians in the World, Farewell and Godspeed, and Blessing of a Dwelling. These brief rituals provide a formal way of recognizing and affirming important life experiences and passages of God's people, and bringing these before God and the parish community in prayer.
27. Pastors and worship committees are encouraged to prepare and adopt a PARISH CUSTOMARY for the use of the congregation. This is a handbook which identifies and records the customs and practices of worship normally followed by the congregation, and includes explanations and interpretations of these customs. The Customary might include such things as frequency of communion, responsibilities of various assisting ministers, placement and storage of banners, sacramental vessels, paraments, times of special services (such as Christmas and Holy Week), places of purchase for wine, bread, candles, and so on. The customary provides a record of congregational practices which will be of assistance to new Worship Committee members and pastors, and can also protect the congregation's worship practices from cavalier adaptation by over-zealous new committee members or pastors! Although not meant to be "chiseled in stone" but periodically revised, the Customary provides a written account, arrived at by consensus, which says, "this is the way we do things here."

28. Lutherans are often invited to take part in occasions of ECUMENICAL WORSHIP. Our catholic heritage blesses and endorses such participation, even though we know that we may not agree in all things with other participants on such occasions. Normally, ecumenical worship services will be non-sacramental services of word and prayer, as we presently enjoy eucharistic hospitality only with the Anglican Church of Canada. A broad guideline for our participation in ecumenical worship would be to determine that all other participants hold to a trinitarian confession of God.
29. Especially in smaller communities, Lutherans are often invited to participate in public occasions of CIVIC WORSHIP. This might include occasions as diverse as Remembrance Day services, offering prayers at public gatherings, and even participation in funerals in the wake of community disasters. Although the situations may often be liturgically foreign to us, and the contexts less than trinitarian, we need not fear participating. We know that God is present everywhere. And, as Paul in his witness to the Athenians was able to respect their faith in their “unknown god”, so we may stand with and before those who believe differently than we do, to minister and witness as we are able.

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