

Worship In Our Schools

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Part One

- A. Public worship is central in the life of the Church because it has as its objectives
1. To proclaim the gospel in Word and sacraments
 2. To encourage the response of the people of God
 3. To promote the mutual edification of Christian to Christian
- B. Because of the value the Church places on worship, it brings all God's created gifts to support the objectives of worship.
1. The Church does this not to increase the efficacy of the gospel.
 2. Nor does the Church imply that a certain use of these gifts makes its worship more acceptable to God or more beneficial for God's people.
 3. The Church uses God's created gifts to the best of its ability as it testifies to the value of worship and as it endeavors to be wise and faithful stewards of the mysteries and blessings of God.
- C. Because of its prominent place, the devil attacks the Church's worship
1. He endeavors to compromise the *faithful stewardship* the Church employs in worship. By doing so he encourages worship which is dull, penurious, and irrelevant. This is perhaps the greatest problem in our churches today, especially as it concerns preaching, church music, and the use of the arts. This problem grows out of a caricature of the doctrine of the Word and from a failure to understand the issue of stewardship of God's created gifts in worship.
 2. He endeavors to compromise the *content of worship*, i.e., the gospel. This is the immediate threat to the Lutheran Church from content of worship movement, and it is not a threat to be ignored. This threat is born in a false understanding of the fruits of faith and an idolatrous definition of success. (cf. LCMS and ELCA; Theology of Glory, empiricism)
 3. An ignoring and/or tolerance of the first problem will open the doors to the threat of the second problem.
- D. Our pastors, as the called presiders at public worship and the primary teachers of the congregation, and our LES teachers and staff ministers, as church musicians and nurturers of our children and teens, hold a prominent position in determining the worship life of our congregations. The proper training of future pastors and teachers will assist greatly in addressing the first problem and defending our church against the second problem.
- We also state, however, that students at Wisconsin Lutheran College and those in our area Lutheran high schools also require training in worship. These are the people who as the future lay leaders of our congregations, will respond to the leadership of our public ministers.
- E. Courses in worship on the high school and college level are vital in our school system. These courses ought to include the principles of Lutheran worship, its history, and its specific forms and functions.

- F. As valuable as these courses may be, they cannot be thought to be more important than having our students involved in a worship life which testifies to and is patterned after the principles taught in the classroom. A concern for the practice of public worship is vital, therefore, in the schools of our synod, as well as in the churches our students attend while they are in our schools.
1. There is value in this concern because of the spiritual nourishment our students receive at worship. A worship life that is not patterned after the principles of Lutheran worship must, in fact, compromise the scriptural truths on which those principles are based. For example, a local pastor or a professor who confuses law and gospel in his preaching not only gives future pastors a bad pattern, he also compromises the proclamation of law and gospel, thus endangering the faith of all who worship in his church. This point cannot be overemphasized, but will not be the specific focus of this essay. It is a serious concern, but it is a short-range concern.
 2. There is value in this concern because the principles of Lutheran worship are better “caught than taught.” In the same way that students become good teachers by seeing good teaching, so they come to value and strive for good worship by experiencing good worship, good preaching, good music, good art, etc. When public worship is patterned after the principles of Lutheran worship, those principles are solidified in the minds and hearts of young worshipers, and young worshipers will strive to imitate what they have seen and learned in school. What is true positively will also be true negatively. If students do not see these principles patterned in public worship, they will not be encouraged to imitate the patterns and will consider the teaching of the principles to be nothing more than archaic academia. The value of the pedagogical principle involved here cannot be overemphasized. This is also a serious concern, and it is the focus of this essay, for, in the author’s opinion, it has long-range ramifications in our church body.

Part Two

- A. The form of worship which has allowed the Church during most of its history to proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments and at the same time to employ with faithful stewardship God’s created gifts is called liturgical worship.
1. Definition of liturgical worship
 2. Focus on the pattern of the *western church*
 3. Focus on *Word and Sacrament*
 4. Focus on the life and acts of Christ via the Church year and its appointed emphases
 5. Focus on the *interaction* of people and presider (dialogue)
 6. Focus on the intentional inclusion of the arts as vehicles for the gospel and for the peoples’ response
- B. Luther’s determination and the determination of the Lutheran Confessions to retain the liturgical form was born out of an allegiance to the principles of worship the reformers discovered on the pages of the Scriptures.
1. The gospel must predominate at worship: *the Means of Grace principle*
 2. The people must participate at worship: *the universal priesthood principle*
 3. The tradition must be honored at worship: *the Holy Christian Church principle*
 4. The arts must be used at worship: *the stewardship principle*
- C. Throughout the history of the Church, as well as on the contemporary scene, the disavowal of the liturgical style and its set of principles has invariably signaled the devaluation or even the loss of the doctrines on which those principles are based.

1. Examples from medieval Roman Catholicism
2. Examples from German Pietism
3. Examples from American Revivalism
4. Examples from neo-evangelicalism
5. Examples from the Church Growth Movement

D. History also testifies to the reality that the public worship of the Lutheran Church has often become susceptible to the loss of its principles (and the resulting loss of its doctrinal emphases) when those principles have not been faithfully put into practice in the Church's worship.

1. Pietism was in many ways a reaction to poor worship in the orthodox Lutheran Church
2. Many Lutherans today become impressed with neo-evangelical and church growth worship patterns (and the author includes here much of what is called Christian contemporary music) because of the dull, penurious, and irrelevant worship life in their own congregations and church body.

E. Our congregations as well as our schools are wise to consider these encouragements from Pastor Paul Kelm's Parish Renewal: Theses and Implications:

Worship must be what the church does best, for in our worship we minister to the greatest number of our members and introduce visitors to our Lord. Our worship is still the most apparent statement of the "worth" we ascribe to our God. The challenge for Lutherans today is to combine the best of our tradition with contemporary communication, to be both faithful to Scripture and relevant to, contemporary life, to touch head and heart with the message of sin and grace in an age of anti-Christian philosophy, to lift refugees from a jaded generation in praise to their God.

- a) Lutherans must strive for the best preaching possible. That is the product of quality time spent in text study and sermon preparation. Preachers need continuing education in homiletics. Those whose dominant gifts lie in other areas of ministry can benefit from published sermon studies. We need to be both open to the Lord as we study his Word and open to improvement in our crafting and delivery of the message.
- b) Lutheran worship should have clear liturgical progression and a "freshness" each week that is combined with familiarity. That requires easy-to-follow orders of worship, a "personal" tone by the officiant and his conviction that corporate worship is much more than sandwiching a sermon.
- c) Lutherans will want to offer the best instrumental and choral music possible. That will mean training opportunities for church musicians and the availability of music appropriate to a variety of abilities, occasions and preferences. That may mean more than one choir where possible, with varied musical styles. That may mean more than one musical instrument.
- d) Lutheran worship should combine warmth and reverence, avoiding the extremes of cold and trivial fads. That means attention to detail so that slip-ups don't distract our focus. That means also a style of leading worship that reflects God's love for people.
- e) The Lord's Supper should have deep significance and a clear focus on God's grace. Churches may need to find better ways to prepare communicants for the sacrament than the sign-up sheets which have replaced the confessional service and personal "communion announcements" of an earlier generation.

Part Three

A. For all the reasons we have noted in this study, we, the teachers of the Church's future pastors, teachers, staff ministers and lay leaders, must model for the students of our schools a public worship which is

consistent with and which emphasizes the principles of Lutheran worship. I suggest that worship at our schools includes:

B. The use of the Christian calendar and its lectionary as the basis for school chapel

Students will to come to “live in the lectionary,” and to know its themes and emphases. Points of view which maintain that subjects important for school life are not covered in the lectionary are inconsistent with all the testimony which is mounted to encourage pastors and church musicians to plan public worship around the lectionary. Topical approaches, planned either annually or individually, do not help to teach the lectionary.

The festivals of the Church calendar can receive special attention and treatment at our schools (cf. C below). The schools also might give attention to minor festivals, e.g., saints’ days and commemorations.

C. The use of the historic liturgical forms that are included in *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*.

It is obvious that the main communion services cannot be used daily in school chapel. However, the rites of the office, as much a part of Lutheran tradition as the communion service and espousing the same set of principles, can be used regularly. Besides Morning Praise (Matins) and Evening Prayer (Vespers), the schools might devise versions of Prime and Compline.

School schedules could be established in such a way that major festivals and some minor festivals can be observed in a full service. An annual set of festival services might include:

St. Michael and All Angels	September 29
End Time I (Reformation)	late October
End Time Last Christ the King	late November
Christmas	just before Christmas vacation
Epiphany	January 6
St. Matthias Apostle	February 24
Ash Wednesday	mid-March
Easter	when classes resume after Easter vacation
Ascension	40 days after Easter

D. The use of the complete liturgical rite could include the Sacrament of Holy Communion

1. We believe and confess that the Sacrament offers the forgiveness and sins and thus strengthens faith in Christ. There is value, therefore, in receiving the Sacrament often.
2. We believe and confess that the Sacrament is a testimony of spiritual and confessional unity. There is value, therefore, in students united by a single goal partaking of the Sacrament together.
3. Together with what we hold concerning the Sacrament expressed above, we believe and confess that the proper use of the Sacrament is one of the marks of the Church. The use of the Sacrament in our schools helps to underscore and solidify what we believe and confess.
4. The use of the Sacrament allows for the use of the full liturgical rite. By the use of the full liturgical rite students in our schools are able to see how God’s created gifts are brought into use for the sake of the Sacrament as well as for the sake of the Word.
5. The use of the Sacrament on campus might better allow for pre-communion preparation. Students who anticipate receiving the Sacrament at a campus service might be encouraged to speak with the Dean or his assistants before reception. The school through its chapel devotions might also be able to model a pastoral pre-communion practice.
6. Considering our doctrine of Church and Ministry, it is as natural that our schools include the Sacrament in campus worship as it is for local congregations and synodical gatherings of pastors, teachers, and laypeople to do the same.

7. It is consistent with our campus practice that the Dean of Students and his staff exercise pastoral responsibility as the Sacrament is offered to members of a student body. As far as pastoral responsibility for communing students is concerned, it is likely that the Dean of Students is able to exercise such responsibility *as well* as the local pastor.
8. We suggest that not every campus worship gathering is well suited for the inclusion of the Sacrament. Services at which campus visitors, among whom the Dean of Students does not have pastoral responsibility, might wisely not include the Sacrament.
9. We suggest that some might consider the use of the Sacrament to have more application on the college and seminary campuses than on the prep school campuses.
10. We suggest that a student's home pastor could be advised of the student's campus communion attendance.

The Seminary faculty is in the process of studying the above theses on Holy Communion and has been positive in its reaction to them. Before the Sacrament is included in campus services, however, the faculty will seek the advice and consent of the Seminary Board and the Board for Ministerial Education as well as input from the faculties of the other synodical schools.

- E. The use of the liturgical forms from *Christian Worship* will encourage a brimming and vibrant use of good church music.

These include the Psalm of the Day, the Verse of the Day, the Hymn of the Day, the Seasonal Responses, and the liturgical canticles.

Drawing upon the musical talent found in our schools which is molded by capable musical and liturgical leadership, these worship forms could be put into use with great variety and creativity.

Our schools can take the lead in using the great songs of liturgical worship. We might commission new musical settings for the texts of the liturgy, for the psalms, the Verse, the Seasonal Responses, and the Hymn of the Day. These new forms could find value in our area Lutheran high schools as well as in our ministerial schools. Such efforts would help young people see that music can be fresh and vibrant and still maintain the doctrinal strengths of the historic liturgical texts.

It goes without saying that the emphasis on liturgical worship will encourage a wide and excellent use of worship's occasional music for the organ and other instruments.

- F. Our students—and our Synod—would receive great benefit if they observed the liturgical principles carried out in buildings that are conducive to these principles.

The architectural emphases which students come to appreciate during their school years (e.g., art as gospel proclamation, the symbolism of altar, pulpit, and font, acoustics, etc.) will be carried into the congregations of our synod as these young people become pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and laypeople. This will help overcome the (frankly) bad church building that sometimes occurs in the WELS

- G. Worship on campus can assist our students to value the use of good art so that they might grow to become unafraid of encouraging such art in their future congregations.

We must overcome the missions/art conflict. As many authors have pointed out (including Prof. Harold Johnes in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* and *Christian Worship Manual*) the support of Missions and of good art is not an either/or but a both/and situation. Students will come to understand this reality when their schools model such a balance.

- H. It seems that our students would benefit if they see in the school's pattern of public worship the normal worship situation, i.e., that a man trained as a pastor is the presiding minister at public worship.

Teacher-trained and lay leaders preside at worship situations that are oriented toward small group devotions. These might include evening chapel, dormitory devotions, and small group assemblies. Pastor-trained leaders preside at the regular worship assemblies of the school.

Such a practice places people into positions for which they have been trained. Placing a teacher into a pulpit is not so different from placing a pastor into a methods class. This is not to say that a teacher cannot preach or that a pastor cannot teach a methods class. It means to say that we train workers for the tasks they will assume and that we need to have good reasons for placing anyone into a role for which he has not been trained.

Such a practice underscores the distinction in responsibilities of pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and laypeople. This distinction is especially important in our era. We desire to uphold two principles:

- People besides pastors may serve full-time in the public ministry
- The pastoral office is an office of oversight and the most inclusive form of the gospel ministry

Asking teachers or laypeople to preside at public worship blurs this distinction, sets an inaccurate pattern for future workers, and encourages a practice which is inconsistent with both our custom and the scripture's careful instructions concerning public ministry.

- I. Students at our schools ought to see presiding ministers vested in the historic vestments of the Christian Church.

Students benefit from knowing that the vestments of pastors are not chosen on the basis of personal preference alone but with an eye to the practice of the Church. While these practices are free (as are all liturgical practices save the proclamation of the gospel), our schools are wise to establish a reasoned standard for its chapel presiders and quietly encourage that the standard be observed by those who preside at worship.

- J. Students at our schools might become familiar and comfortable with the ceremonies and symbols of Christian worship, i.e., kneeling, processions, the sign of the cross, etc.

The use of the ceremonies of worship help students in a variety of ways:

- They are exposed to practices which have been part of the Christian and Lutheran tradition for centuries but which, for various reasons, were not a part of their own worship experience.
- They come to experience the personal and pastoral value of ceremony in worship.
- They are obligated to come to grips with the issue of adiaphora when they experience ceremonies "neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture" (FC, Art 10) being used despite the fact that these ceremonies are new to them and at first perhaps uncomfortable.
- They learn that preferences and practices learned "at home" are not always the better practices and that practices not used "at home" are not necessarily bad practices.

Part Four

- A. All of our schools, those whose emphasis is the training of public ministers and those whose emphasis is the training of Christian laypeople, ought to speak with a single and united voice on the issue of public worship.
- B. To train pastors in one way, to train teachers and staff ministers in another way, and to train laypeople in still another way is to invite confusion and acrimony into the parishes of our synod. May it not be said that agreement in principle stifles congregational creativity and originality. Such an argument sets up a straw man. There is plenty of room within the principles for creativity and originality. The historical reality is, however, that creativity and originality outside of these worship principles have invariably been a part of the loss of the gospel and the orthodox confession of the truth.
- C. A disagreement on the principles of worship, whether this disagreement is gained in the classroom or by means of campus worship models, invites the temptations spoken of at the beginning of this essay.

- D. Agreement on the principles gained in the classrooms of our schools and in the public worship of the campus, will lead, under the grace and blessing of God, to a synodical worship life which, for the glory of God, showcases the Means of Grace and places into the service of the gospel all of God's created gifts. With such a worship practice and attitude, believers will happily and hopefully await the blessing of the Spirit on human hearts for the strengthening of faith and life.
- E. We suggest that representatives of the schools meet from time to time to discuss campus worship and to offer suggestions and hear feedback from colleagues in ministry. There may be wisdom our discussions with the pastors that serve our campus communities and with representatives of the area Lutheran high schools.