

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

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G. INTERDENOMINATIONAL COOPERATION – CHURCH MOVEMENTS

The Lutheran Church of Australia and interfaith worship

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Lutheran congregations or their pastors are sometimes invited to take part in worship services which involve representatives of the world's major religions.

Typically, such interfaith services are arranged to give thanks to God (however 'God' may be understood by the different participants) for bushfire fighters, the Red Cross, body donors, deliverance from a threatened peril — in fact, to thank God for whomever or whatever has gained the gratitude of the local community.

Sometimes interfaith services are arranged to plead with 'God' for favourable weather, good crops, social justice, success in combating moral evils such as discrimination or pornography, or for help in times of war or other crises.

The position of the Lutheran Church of Australia is expressed in the following principles and guidelines:

1. In authentic worship God's people come into the presence of the true God to be served by him and to respond to him with their sacrifices of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. An encounter between God's people and a false god is not authentic worship. According to the first and greatest commandment, such false worship is idolatry (compare Matt 4:10; 22:36).
2. Clearly, then, Christians cannot rightly participate in an act of worship in which a god other than the Triune God is acknowledged and addressed as the true God (1 Corinthians 8:5,6).
3. The true God has revealed himself and made known his name as God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:18,19). His name conveys his presence and reveals his identity.

The name 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit' distinguishes the true God from false gods, who bear other names.

4. The word 'god' does not sufficiently identify the true God or distinguish him from false gods. The word 'god' is not so much a name or a title as the general or generic term for a particular kind of being (see Luther's interpretation of 'god' in his explanation of the First Commandment in his *Large Catechism*).
5. Christians may not participate in acts of worship where the deity is addressed as 'God' but where this term is deliberately and consistently left undefined and vague. Such acts of worship are attempts to mix different faiths; at best they give an ambiguous witness to the true God.

Christian faith confesses that the 'god' referred to in an interfaith setting is not the true God, if it is implied that participants are free to fill the word 'god' with whatever content and meaning fits their own religion. Such thinking and acting is offensive to the true God, who is a jealous God (Exo 20:5).

6. When members of the Lutheran church are invited to participate in an **interfaith** religious service to express communal gratitude, it is recommended that, since such a religious service is for them out of the question, they urge the organisers to arrange an event without a religious component, so that thanks can be offered to people (rather than thanksgiving to 'God').
7. On the other hand, Lutherans may join with **other Christians** in specially- arranged interdenominational services of thanksgiving and supplication to the Triune God (for guidelines, see Theses of Agreement II, especially paragraphs 4 and 6 in DSTO I, A5).