

# Lutheran Church of Australia: Commission on Worship

## STATEMENT 21

### LENTEN OBSERVANCES

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*The main part of this statement was adopted by the Department of Liturgics, June 1989, and further resources were added later that year. The Department prepared the statement to provide guidelines for congregational Lenten observances, particularly mid-week Lenten services. Different activities during Lent were being tried in the church, and the Department was asked for advice.*

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#### 1 The purpose of Lent

The central feast of the Christian year is Easter, celebrating the resurrection of our Lord, his victory over sin, death, and Satan. Each Sunday is, in fact, a mini-Easter.

Lent is the period of preparation for Easter. Historically its length has varied, but now it is generally 40 days (excluding the Sundays) — as a reminder of the 40 days of fasting of our Lord after his baptism at the beginning of his ministry. (Moses also remained 40 days on the mountain at the giving of God's law; Elijah spent 40 days on Mount Horeb; and the children of Israel spent 40 years wandering in the desert before entering the promised land.)

The Sundays in Lent are traditionally not regarded as part of the Lenten season, since they remain in some ways commemorations of Easter. However, they still have some of the restraint of Lent, shown in the omission of the hallelujahs, for example.

Historically, the Lenten season has included:

- catechetical instruction in preparing for baptism
- meditation on Christ's suffering for our sins
- fasting and other bodily abstinence, as a reminder of Christ's self-denial and as an aid to meditation.

#### 2 Lenten observances

Congregations could consider the following emphases for Lent:

- **Instruction** could be given emphasis on the Sundays. This could vary in method; the content could include a systematic treatment of the church's main teachings, the appointed readings, or Luther's Small Catechism. Where applicable, the instruction could lead to baptism (the Easter vigil order includes a place for baptism and an affirmation of the baptismal vow).
- **Fasting** could still be encouraged throughout the season, especially on Wednesdays (the day of the betrayal of Christ) and/or Fridays (the day of his death), intensifying in Holy Week. One possibility is fasting prior to the mid-week service. Families might choose to forgo the Wednesday evening meal before the service, or abstain from such things as meat, alcohol, dairy products, or dessert. (Note that Luther in his Small Catechism,

while emphasising the pre-eminence of faith, says that ‘fasting and other outward preparations serve a good purpose’.)

- **Meditation** on Christ’s suffering and its meaning for us could be given mid-week emphasis, as in Wednesday night devotional services. Meditations could also be held where appropriate on the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of Holy Week.

### 3 Outline of mid-week Lenten devotional services

The following is a possible structure for mid-week Lenten devotional services:

- **Opening.** This could be the invocation and/or responsive verses from an appropriate Scripture passage such as Isaiah 53 or Psalm 22.
- **Psalm or hymn** suitable for Lent.
- **Prayer:**  
For example:  
M. Let us pray (for \_\_\_\_\_).  
*Pause for silent prayer.*  
An appropriate summarising collect. This could be the collect of the week.
- **Reading(s).** One or more readings from one of the gospel narratives of Christ’s suffering and death. The readings throughout the mid-week devotions could be continuous, and taken from the gospel assigned to that particular year in the 3-year lectionary (ie according to Matthew in year A, Mark in year B, Luke in year C; John is read in Holy Week, particularly Good Friday).

The reading may be broken into two segments and a silence for private reflective meditation be held between them and again after the second. Appropriate responsive verses may then be said.

- **Address.** A short address (say 5–10 minutes) may be given by the pastor. This may be followed by silence for meditation and then a hymn.
- **Prayers.** The prayers may be introduced by a response such as:

M. Listen to my prayer, Lord,  
C. and hear my cry for help.

One to three short prayers, preferably collect style, may be prayed. The last could be the collect for peace (*Lutheran Hymnal with Supplement* p 53) or Luther’s evening prayer (*LHS* p 57).

A pause for silent prayer between the spoken prayers could be observed. Instead of collects, a suitable litany could be used.

- **Lord’s Prayer**

- **Blessing.** The pastor pronounces the blessing. The congregation may then leave the church in silence, or remain for a while in private prayer or reflective meditation.

It is preferable if announcements after the service can be avoided.

#### 4 Resources for Lenten devotional services

**Alternative opening verses** could be taken from the beatitudes (Matt 5:3-10), Philippians 2:5-11, selected verses from Habakkuk 3, or Isaiah 38:10-20. The opening sentences of vespers could be used, or the ‘Lamb of God’ from the liturgy (*LHS* p 19 or p 73).

**Suitable psalms:** 31, 32, 38, 42, 43, 51, 57, 69, 77, 130, 143.

**Hymns.** In addition to the Passion and Lent sections in *LHS*, suitable hymns may be found in other sections such as Redeemer and various sections of The Christian Life.

#### Brief prayers

- Lord and Father, to you alone those in great debt can come with hope of mercy. Have mercy on us, Lord, for we have nothing with which to repay you. Forgive us all our debt, forgive us all our sins, and make us merciful to others; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.
- Lord, for your tender mercies’ sake, do not take account of our sins, but forgive what is past and help us to amend our lives, to decline from sin and incline to virtue, so that we may walk with a perfect heart in your presence, now and forever.
- Take out of our hearts, Lord God, all self-assertion and boasting, all desire to excuse ourselves proudly in front of others; help us rather to take as our master and king the one who chose to be crowned with thorns and to die in shame for others and for us all, your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.
- Lord God, you make all things work together for good to those who love you. Pour into our hearts such constant love towards you that the pure desires aroused in us by your Holy Spirit may not be turned aside by any temptation; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- Merciful, eternal God, you did not spare your own Son, but gave him up for us all, so that he might bear our sin on the cross. Do not let our hearts be daunted or discouraged in this faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- Lord Jesus Christ, you have given your life to redeem us, yourself for our example, your word for our rule, your love for our guide, your body on the cross for our sin. Enter our hearts and take possession of them, and live with us forever.
- Lord, grant that we may glory only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to us, and we to the world.
- Merciful Father, grant us the life-giving power of your Holy Spirit, so that in whatever cross you lay upon us, we may recognise your fatherly discipline, accept it with patience, and endure it with cheerfulness; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
- Lord Jesus Christ, help us to be meek and patient as you were, so that we may gently bear with the faults of others, and strive always to root out our own; for your sake.

- Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost; to fight the good fight of faith and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for rest; to labour and to ask for no reward, except to know that we do your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- Lord God, heavenly Father, watch over us in your mercy, and guard us in all temptation, so that, by the help of your Holy Spirit, we may live according to your will, and in all needs receive the comfort of your goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- Father and God of all comfort, grant us through your word and Holy Spirit a firm, happy, and thankful faith, to overcome all trials; help us to realise that it is the truth when your dear Son Jesus Christ himself says: 'Take heart! I have overcome the world.'
- Look on us, Lord, and let all our darkness vanish in your brightness. Fill us with holy love, and open to us the treasures of your wisdom. All our desires are known to you; so make perfect what you have begun and what your Spirit has awakened us to ask for. We seek your face; turn your face towards us and show us your glory, so that our longing is satisfied and our peace is made perfect; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- Heavenly Father, give calmness and control of thought to all who are facing uncertainty and anxiety; let their hearts be firm, believing in the Lord. Be all things to all people, knowing all individuals and their prayers, each house and its need; for the sake of Jesus Christ.
- Stay with us, Lord, for it is towards evening and the day is almost over. Stay with us and with your whole church. Stay with us at the end of the day, at the end of our life, at the end of the world. Stay with us with your grace and goodness, with your holy word and sacrament, with your comfort and blessing. Stay with us when we face the night of suffering and fear, the night of doubt and temptation, the night of bitter death. Stay with us and with all your faithful ones, through time and eternity.
- Watch, dear Lord, with those who wake, or watch, or weep tonight, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend your sick ones, Lord Christ. Rest your weary ones. Bless your dying ones. Soothe your suffering ones. Pity your troubled ones. Shield your joyous ones. We ask all this, for your love's sake.
- Lord be with all of us; drive away the devil and remove every trap he sets; let your holy angels stay with us to keep us in peace; and let your blessing be always on us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- Lighten our darkness, O Lord, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night, for the love of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.
- O Lord, support us all the day long of this troubled life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, Lord, in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging, a holy rest, and peace at last; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- Be with us, merciful God, and protect us through the silent hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this fleeting world may rest on your eternal changelessness; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, as you rested in the tomb at the evening hour, and so sanctified the grave to be a bed of hope for your people: Lead us to sorrow for our sins, which were the cause of your suffering and death; and when our bodies lie in the dust, take us to live with you; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- The Song of Simeon (*LHS* p 51 or p 74).

## Litanies

- The litany on page 80 of *LHS* (note that this is not in the *Supplement*, but only in the combined book).
- Lord, have mercy on us.  
**Christ, have mercy on us.**  
 Lord, have mercy on us.  
 From all evil,  
**Lord Jesus, deliver us.**  
 By the mystery of your incarnation;  
 by your holy life;  
 by your bitter suffering and death;  
 by your prayer repeated three times;  
 by your sacred body buffeted and beaten;  
 by the spitting on your face;  
 by the false judgment pronounced on you by Caiphas;  
 by your painful crown of thorns;  
 by your purple robe of mockery;  
 by your unjust condemnation;  
 by your bearing of your own cross;  
 by the tearing off of your garments;  
 by your dreadful crucifixion;  
 by the anguish you suffered on the cross;  
 by your prayers and tears  
 by the insults you endured;  
 by the shedding of your precious blood;  
 by your patience and humility;  
 by the love with which you loved us to the end:  
**Lord Jesus, deliver us.**  
 We sinners beg you:  
**Lord Jesus, hear us.**  
 That being dead to sin, we may live to righteousness;  
 that we may glory only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ;  
 that we may take up our cross daily and follow you;  
 that your blood may cleanse us from dead works to serve the living God;  
 that taking your example, we may follow in your steps;  
 that sharing in your sufferings we may also share in your glory:  
**Lord Jesus, hear us.**  
 Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world;  
**have mercy on us.**  
 Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world;  
**have mercy on us.**  
 Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world;  
**grant us peace.**  
 We praise and adore you, Lord Jesus;  
**by your cross you have redeemed the world.**  
 Lord Jesus Christ, you were lifted up on the cross to redeem the world, and you shed your blood for the forgiveness of sins. Lead us through your suffering and death into the gates of Paradise with joy.  
**Amen.**

- Lord, have mercy on us.  
**Christ, have mercy on us.**  
 Lord, have mercy on us.  
 You have taken away the sins of the world, O Christ;  
**have mercy on us.**  
 You sit at the right hand of the Father;  
**receive our prayer.**  
 You were silent before your accusers;  
**open our lips to sing your praise.**  
 You prayed for your enemies;  
**fill our hearts with love towards all people.**  
 You proclaimed God's truth before the world;  
**help us to bear witness to you, our Lord and our Redeemer.**  
 You humbled yourself;  
**teach us true humility.**  
 You willingly bore your cross;  
**help us to accept whatever cross may be placed on us.**  
 You said: 'I am the Son of God';  
**hallowed be your name.**  
 You said: 'I am a king';  
**your kingdom come.**  
 You prayed: 'Father, not my will but your will be done';  
**your will be done, on earth as in heaven.**  
 You cried: 'I thirst';  
**give us today our daily bread.**  
 You asked forgiveness for your enemies;  
**forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.**  
 You were tempted in the desert;  
**lead us not into temptation.**  
 You committed your spirit into the hands of your Father;  
**deliver us from evil.**  
 You were crowned with thorns;  
**the kingdom is yours.**  
 You sank into the arms of death;  
**the power is yours.**  
 You redeemed us from sin, death, and hell;  
**the glory is yours, now and forever. Amen.**

### Blessings

- The Lord bless you and keep you.  
 The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.  
 The Lord look upon you with favour and give you peace.
- The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.
- (May) Christ our crucified Saviour draw you to himself, so that you may find in him the assurance of sins forgiven and the gift of eternal life; and the blessing of almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be with you always.
- (May) the God of peace make you holy and keep you free from every fault until our Lord Jesus Christ comes in his glory.

- The God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, equip you by the blood of the eternal covenant with everything good, so that you may do his will, working in you what is pleasing to him.
- The Lord bless you, and keep you from all evil, and bring you to eternal life.
- The almighty and merciful God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless and keep you.