

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

VOLUME 2 K. WORSHIP

Guidelines for services on special occasions

Prepared by the Department of Liturgics and adopted by the Commission on Worship in October 1993. This version adopted May 1998.

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THE SITUATION UNDER DISCUSSION

Pastors and congregations are often asked to become involved in the commemoration of special occasions in the life of the nation, or in the life of the Lutheran church and the lives of its members.

In these guidelines we distinguish between civic and ecumenical acts of worship for special occasions (Part 1), and observances of special occasions within the regular worship of the congregation (Part 2).

1. CIVIC AND ECUMENICAL ACTS OF WORSHIP

These include occasions such as Anzac Day, World Day of Prayer, and a carol service sponsored by a local ministers' association.

Principles

- In its worship the church offers service on behalf of the world. Therefore the church may properly commemorate special occasions in the secular and religious life of its members and of society.
- The presence and activity of the Triune God is the centre of Christian worship. The concerns of the special occasion should not become the centre of worship.
- Generally speaking, the church makes its unique contribution to these commemorations through the ministry of corporate intercession.
- The presiding minister has the responsibility for planning and conducting these observances.

GUIDELINES FOR SERVICES ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS

- No party or group of people should be allowed to use the occasion merely to gain publicity and solicit support for its cause.
- The church confesses that we can approach the Father only through his Son. Therefore the church cannot host or participate in acts of common worship with non-Christian religions.
- The church cannot commemorate an occasion (such as a Hindu festival), or host an organisation (such as the Free Masons), which contradicts or compromises its confession of faith.

Guidelines for pastors and worship leaders

- Be involved in the planning of these occasions, even if you do not lead or host them. In this way you can make sure that you do not compromise your confession of faith by your participation.
- Do not violate the consciences of those present by making them affirm what they do not believe.
- Minister to the people in the name of the Triune God by reading from the Scriptures, preaching God's word as relevant to the occasion, praying for people according to their needs, and blessing them.
- Keep such acts of worship clearly directed, with a single main focus.
- Restrict congregational involvement to such uncomplicated and familiar activities as the singing of hymns, and, if appropriate, the saying of the Lord's Prayer.
- If any hymns are sung, use well-known ones with simple singable tunes.

2. CONGREGATIONAL SERVICES WITH SPECIAL OBSERVANCES

These include observances of such occasions as Mother's Day and Youth Sunday within the regular congregational worship.

Guidelines for pastors and worship leaders

- Use the set liturgy and propers for the Sunday, so that the central focus is on the Lord's day and activity rather than on the human occasion and its concerns.
- Consider whether, and to what extent, the nature of the occasion should determine your choice of hymns, the text for the sermon and its application, and the nature of the offertory.
- Commemorate the occasion particularly by the content of the intercessions offered in the prayer of the church or as collects in matins and vespers.
- Let God's word determine how you preach and pray on that occasion.
- Avoid interrupting the flow of the liturgy by unnecessary references to the occasion. Specific remarks can be made in announcements before or after the service.