

Lutheran Church of Australia: Commission on Worship

STATEMENT 39

THE USE OF SCRIPTURAL SENTENCES IN THE DIVINE SERVICE

Draft 2

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The *LCA Worship Resources* recommend that suitable sentences may be selected from the readings for the day and used in various places in the communion service. It also provides some for use in each Sunday and festival. This statement gives the theological rationale for the practice and provides some criteria for their selection.

1. The Theological Basis for the Liturgical Use of Scriptural Sentences

- a. Our Lord Jesus did not just teach and enact his Father's word in his earthly ministry; he also gave that word to the apostles and their successors, so that it would be taught and enacted liturgically in the church. Thus in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 St Paul speaks about the word of God which is 'enacted' and so 'active' in the congregation at Thessalonika.
- b. From its beginning the church has used the Scriptures liturgically in at least three ways. They were read in the divine service; they were expounded in the sermon; they were used to determine what was spoken and done in the service. This practice derived from the conviction that the Lord Jesus did not just give his word to be preached and taught, but also to govern everything else that was done in the service, such as the confession of sins and the enactment of the absolution, prayer and praise, the confession of faith and the acclamation of Christ, the greeting of the faithful and the performance of blessings.
- c. In his teaching Luther emphasises this liturgical use of God's word. On the basis of John 17:17 and 1 Timothy 4:5, he argues that God's word is his most holy gift to us, for it alone can make us and our worship holy, a work of God (LC 1, 91-94). His word does not just authorise and establish what is done in the service; it anoints his people and sanctifies their deeds with his Holy Spirit, so that the whole service is a holy, Spirit-produced offering to God the Father through Jesus Christ (1 Pet 2:5). Luther concludes: *Places, times, persons, and the entire outward order of service have therefore been instituted and appointed in order that God's word may exert its power publicly* (LC 1, 94). Thus in his essay *Concerning the Ministry* of 1523 he makes this claim: *we teach with the Word, we consecrate with the Word, we sacrifice with the Word, we judge all things by the Word* (LW 40, 21).
- d. The use of sentences from the readings does not just serve an important didactic purpose by teaching us how to worship the living God; together with the other uses of God's word in the service they energise us with the Holy Spirit, who makes us and our worship holy and pleasing to God the Father through faith in Christ and his word.

2. The Nature and Function of Scriptural Sentences in the Divine Service

- a. Some Scriptural passages, such as the Offertory or the Words of Institution, perform an important function **within** a ritual enactment. These Scriptural sentences **introduce** a ritual enactment but are not essential to it.
- b. They are usually chosen from the readings or the psalm of the day and so connect the readings with what is done elsewhere in the service.

- c. It is best to choose a single short sentence so that it does not distract attention from what is enacted but actually clarifies what happens in it.
- d. The sentence that is chosen should not disrupt the flow of the service but should fit its liturgical context by functioning in a way that is consistent with the enactment that it introduces.
- e. A service on any given day should not be cluttered with too many additional sentences.
- f. The sentence is either spoken by the pastor, or, in some cases, as with the traditional antiphons, responsively by the pastor and the congregation.
- g. Scriptural sentences may perform a number of different pastoral functions in the divine service
 - They prepare of people for involvement in an enactment, such as the use of Ephesians 2:18 before the Invocation.
 - They issue an invitation for participation in an enactment, such as the use of John 6:54 before the Distribution.
 - They provide the divine basis for an enactment, such the use of John 20:22b-23 before the rite of Confession and Absolution.
 - They explain the nature of an enactment, such as the use of 1 John 1:8-9 before the rite of Confession and Absolution.
 - They state the purpose of an enactment, such as the use of 1 Timothy 2:4 before the Prayer of the Church.
 - They give a promise that is fulfilled through the enactment, such as the use of Matthew 10:32 before the Creed.

3. The Possible Location of Additional Scriptural Sentences in the Service

- a. *The Service with Communion* uses Scriptural sentences as part of its regular order in the following places.
 - Two sentences from the psalms before the Confession of Sins
 - A responsive sentence from Psalm 121:2 and 124:8 to acknowledge our reliance on our Creator for our deliverance from death
 - A responsive sentence from Psalm 32:5 to confess our faith in God's forgiveness of us
 - A responsive sentence from Psalm 107:1, or a responsive sentence from Psalm 111:4, as a call to thanksgiving before the Prayer of Thanksgiving after Holy Communion
 - An admonition from Psalm 41:13, (also found in 72:18; 89:52; and 106:48,) to acknowledge the Lord as the giver of blessing before the final Benediction
- b. Additional Scriptural sentences may be used in the following places in the divine service
 - A sentence with a proclamation, promise, or invitation before the Invocation
 - A sentence with a command, promise, invitation or instruction before the Confession of Sins
 - A sentence with a promise or instruction before the Prayer for the Day
 - A sentence with a promise or proclamation of Christ as the Hallelujah verse after the second reading
 - A sentence with a promise, such as Matthew 10:32 or Romans 10:9, before the Creed
 - A sentence with a command, promise, or instruction on prayer before the Prayer of the Church
 - A sentence with an invitation or instruction before the Distribution
 - A sentence with an invitation or instruction before the Prayer after Communion
 - A sentence with a promise, charge (admonition), or commission before the blessing

