

WORSHIP AND OUTREACH

Papers prepared by a taskforce consisting of representatives of the then Board of Congregational Life and the Commission on Theology of the Lutheran Church of Australia, on the relationship between worship and outreach, released 1993.

A. PUBLIC WORSHIP

1. **Corporate Christian worship is public.** Through it the Triune God calls all people to himself; and in it the church serves God on behalf of the whole human race.

2. **This worship involves a dialogue between God and people.** The liturgy is not the worship itself, but it is the structure or script of the dialogue. A script is necessary for two reasons: (1) the most important thing is what God says and does, and its wording should be clear, precise, and according to Scripture; and (2) our response is public and corporate, not just private and individual.

3. The eucharistic liturgy may vary in language and style (eg traditional or contemporary, simple or elaborate), and will have different emphases Sunday by Sunday and season by season. But **throughout the year, it is in this script that the dialogue between God and people is at its most complete.** God speaks fully in Word and Sacrament, and the liturgy scripts the full range of what the response of people should be: eg reverence, penitence, trust, love, praise, thanksgiving, joy, good works.

4. None of us as individuals responds to God completely and as we ought. But **the script gives the response of the church, the whole redeemed people of God, and we participate in this according to our own present situation.** Sometimes we don't have much faith or much love, sometimes we don't feel like praising and giving thanks. In the congregation there are also the weak and the ill, the depressed and the burdened, the aged and the little children. But we are not alone, and what we as individuals can't do, the church as a whole does. God lifts us up through his word and action, and also through the response of fellow worshippers.

5. **It is similar with 'unchurched' people who are present.** They also come under the influence of the Holy Spirit. They, too, hear the dialogue between God and the church, and God invites them, too, to join in the church's response according to their situation. God addresses **all** people as sinners with law and gospel, and offers them **all** his gracious forgiveness, comfort, and strengthening (even though not all can immediately partake of the sacrament). The 'unchurched' may at first be able to take in only a little of what God says, and respond only a little.

6. We cannot know exactly the cultural, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual situation of the people present, both regulars and visitors. This will vary from person to person, and for each person from time to time. But **the dialogue of God and the church remains available to all.** No-one should be pressured into a response which they cannot yet honestly give; and no-one should be denied the possibility of as full a response as possible.

7. However, **we should try not to place any stumbling blocks in people's way, apart from the gospel itself.** For both regulars and visitors, we should be sensitive to all the external human factors involved in the dialogue of worship. People should be helped to feel welcome through careful planning and presentation of all aspects of the worship and its setting. Service attendants should notice and provide for visitors' needs; members should be genuinely friendly; well-prepared celebrants should give reverent and joyful leadership in the worship; the language should be clear and direct, without being banal; the musical, visual, and dramatic elements should be rich, well done, and culturally appropriate for the participants; the 'script' should be easy to follow. There will be variety within a reasonably predictable format. These aspects will vary from place to place and from service to service.

8. At the same time, **the church's worship will to some extent always be strange** and foreign to people, because we are not yet in heaven. But **the full dimensions of God's word to us and the response of his people must always be available** in the varying script of the eucharistic liturgy throughout the Church Year. To use another image, the rich menu of the banquet God provides for us in the church's worship should not be limited. There should also be on going instruction in worship for newcomers - as well as for regular worshippers.

9. **The unchurched, then, should be made welcome to the central worship of the church,** the eucharistic liturgy. However, the church will also provide other occasional services to meet the special needs of people, both regular members and interested inquirers. These services may have specific emphases, such as music and song, praise, prayer, confession, proclamation, instruction, and healing. Congregations are also challenged to make the most of the outreach potential of particular occasions when visitors will be present, such as baptisms.

B. GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR OUTREACH ACTIVITIES INVOLVING WORSHIP

The statement on 'Public Worship' assumes that congregations will continue to use their regular communion services for the worship of the members of the congregation. However, in addition, special activities or events may be planned which do indeed involve worship, but which are designed more specifically as part of the congregation's outreach ministry of love to the unchurched and inquirers, in response to our Lord's command to make disciples.

The task force offers the following guidelines and suggestions to help congregations plan such outreach worship events.

1. The main purpose of outreach ministry, including worship, is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and his saving grace. As you plan outreach worship, aim to lead people from encounter with the gospel (evangelisation) through

- instruction in the faith (catechisation), to
- initiation into church membership (Baptism), and on to
- participation in the Lord's Supper (communion with Christ) and

- growth in faith through the practice of discipleship (living in the power of Baptism).

2. Aim to find the most effective ways of communicating to inquirers. This will mean carefully investigating the special needs, backgrounds, levels of understanding, and cultural styles of the people to be reached, and then designing special acts of worship accordingly. These may vary from place to place, and also probably at any one place, as different needs and groups are targeted. Sometimes a complete service may be required; at other times activities may be more appropriate which centre more on fellowship or entertainment or teaching, with only minimal elements of worship, such as proclamation of the gospel and intercessory prayer.

3. Give careful thought to the question of venue: whether it is better to hold the activity in the church or in the hall, inside or outside, on church property or at a community venue.

4. Consider what clothing is best for the worship leader(s); in some cases it may be preferable for the pastor not to wear clerical garments. On the other hand, if the pastor does not robe, he needs to be sure that his choice of clothing actually communicates to the gathering what he wants it to.

5. Choose the best people for the various roles. For example, lay people may be better than the pastor at helping the gathering to feel welcome and comfortable. While the pastor always has the responsibility for the conduct of public worship, activities with an outreach focus give opportunities to make use of the gifts of lay people.

6. Consider using a variety of art forms, such as music, dance, visual arts, drama, and song. Appropriate arts can speak powerfully to people of all ages. But the styles of art chosen should be appropriate to the cultural background of the people present and effective in communicating to them.

This will probably mean using a wide range of styles, particularly when inquirers (and also members) come from a variety of backgrounds and have a variety of tastes and interests. Worship planners and leaders must always be sensitive to this variety. Some people may prefer baroque music, others may prefer rock music. Visitors may be from backgrounds as diverse as Roman Catholic (used to formal worship), Baptist, charismatic (used to non-liturgical worship), Muslim, Jewish, or atheistic (not used to any form of Christian worship).

7. Be sure that the main part of all worship activities is a clear statement of the good news of God's undeserved love and free forgiveness in Jesus, spoken to the actual life situation of the hearers. Make sure, too, that all art forms are compatible with the gospel and enhance it.

8. Consider a variety of ways for communicating the word of God, such as:

- A short popular address, presenting the gospel in a simple relevant way - with both its 'offence' and its appeal. Remember that some of those present may never have heard the gospel before. Remember, too, that the religious jargon familiar to us is not likely to communicate to unchurched.
- Presentation of the gospel message in drama, mime, puppetry, street theatre, dialogue, etc.

- Presentation through songs or readings (not necessarily of the actual words of Scripture, but words conveying its contents), perhaps accompanied by dance or a visual presentation.
- Brief personal testimonies which focus on Christ and emphasise what God has done.
- Discussion, particularly of topics and issues raised by the inquirers.
- Good quality films that present the gospel.
- Good sound or video recordings that present the gospel.

9. Remember that music and songs may be an effective way of reaching and involving some people (not all, though). So be prepared to put a lot of preparation into this area. Use songs that are well known and loved, or at least easily learnt. They may sometimes be presented as a 'performance' by a singer or group. When the assembly is invited to join in, a lead singer or group may be helpful. Sometimes just a refrain may be sung by the people. Quality of presentation is important.

10. Prayer is crucial, particularly preparatory prayers by organisers and those taking part, and silent prayers during the event. Remember to keep on praying for inquirers and visitors, before, during, and after the event.

11. However, take care with public prayer. Inquirers may not be ready to join in prayer, and should not be made to feel under pressure to do something they do not understand or agree with. For example, non-Christians should not feel pressured to join in reading aloud a printed prayer to the Triune God. They must be allowed the space to opt out of any activities they are not ready for. If people present have little understanding of Christian prayer, any prayers that are used publicly will have to be carefully composed, short, and simple.

12. Near the end of the event or service, the pastor may invite any people who have special needs or requests to come forward or to remain behind, so that he and other counsellors can talk with individuals, pray for them, and bless them.

13. Pace is important. Keep the parts of the event following one another smoothly without undue delay, except where pauses for reflection are deliberately planned. Plan carefully, so that the event is neither dragged out nor hurried. Try to keep each part reasonably short. Make sure that all who are leading any part of the activity are quite clear what is expected of them and when they are to do it.

14. Try to put yourself in the place of visitors and inquirers so that you will avoid anything that will cause them embarrassment. Avoid especially any psychological pressure and spiritual coercion. The freedom and integrity of the conscience must be respected. What is presented must always be seen as a genuine free gift that people can take or leave - the gift of Jesus Christ and his grace - although God's word itself may well make them feel uncomfortable.

15. Provide hospitality and opportunities for members and visitors to get to know one another, such as by offering a 'cuppa'. At the same time be sensitive to the fact that some people may wish to leave without being further involved.

16. Show love and sensitivity in the many other practical matters that affect people. Attention to these is important in the regular worship life of the congregation, but it is doubly important when we try to reach out to inquirers and unchurched. Make sure, for example, that the following are adequate: signs (exterior and interior), parking, access for disabled, temperature control, ventilation, lighting, seating, sound equipment, etc. Wisely choose and thoroughly train ushers/greeters who will host people in caring and compassionate ways.

17. Provide opportunities for personal help and follow-up. Let people know who will be available for further discussion.

18. It is important that sponsors of inquirers, elders, and other members of the congregation attend such events to give their fellowship and support to visitors, but not at the expense of their attendance at the service with Holy Communion.

19. Try to hold such outreach events at regular times, so that people get to know the times. Give careful thought to the place of such events in the total worship program of the congregation. The congregation no doubt will continue to hold the service with Holy Communion some time on the Sunday, which throughout the history of the church has been regarded as the Lord's Day and a celebration of the resurrection of our Lord. It is up to the congregation to determine what time on the Sunday the sacrament is celebrated. Each congregation will also need to investigate and determine at what time outreach activities are to be held - what time is most suitable for the people of the community - whether some time on Sunday or on a weekday evening.

20. Be ready, when inquirers express the desire, to lead them further in their journey with Christ. The following should be provided when needed: instruction in the faith; Baptism or reaffirmation of Baptism; assistance in discipleship; admission to the Lords Supper. A rite of reception can be of value at the appropriate point.

21. Worship is of course only one aspect of possible outreach activities. Be prepared to hold other functions and activities to cater for instruction, fellowship, and welfare needs, which cannot be covered in a worship service. These additional activities may also be part of the evangelisation process.