

Lutheran Church of Australia: Commission on Worship

STATEMENT 19

THE PASCHAL CANDLE

Adopted by the Commission on Worship, February 1989. This statement was prepared by the Department of Liturgics to guide pastors and congregations in using the paschal candle, following a growing interest in the Easter 'three days' and the rituals traditionally associated with that time.

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- 1 The paschal candle (sometimes called the Easter candle) is meant to symbolise the presence of the risen Christ, the light of the world, with his faithful people. This candle plays an important role in the Easter vigil service, when it is first brought into the chancel. The rubrics and notes indicate how it is prepared and brought into the church.
- 2 When the Easter vigil is not observed, the paschal candle is placed on its stand in the centre of the chancel before the first service of Easter day, and lit together with other candles.
- 3 After the service on Easter day, the candle may be placed on a stand next to the altar on the gospel side (that is, the left side when facing the altar), where it then remains for either the 40 or 50 days of Easter, lit for each service. Alternatively, it may remain in the chancel, in front of the altar, in order to give it special prominence during the season of Easter.
- 4 According to an old tradition, the paschal candle is extinguished after the gospel on Ascension day, symbolising the fact that on that day Christ withdrew his visible presence from the disciples and returned to his Father.
- 5 According to a more recent practice, the paschal candle remains near the altar or in the chancel until the end of the Easter season, and then it is placed near the baptismal font and lit whenever there is a baptism. This practice underscores the unity of the seven Sundays between Easter and Pentecost, which, in the revised church year, are Sundays *of* Easter, not *after* Easter.
- 6 When the paschal candle is moved next to the font at the end of the Easter season, this may be done within the context of a short ritual near the end of the service on the Seventh Sunday of Easter. The minister or an acolyte may move the lighted candle from the altar area of chancel as the following is said.

Jesus said: I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness.

In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven. (John 8:12; Matt 5:16 TEV)

- 7 The fact that the candle is placed next to the font during the Sundays after Pentecost highlights the close connection between Jesus' death and resurrection and our dying and rising with him through baptism. Through this sacrament we share in the light and life of Christ.
- 8 Where baptismal candles are presented to parents at the baptism of their children, these candles are first lit from the paschal candle, which normally stands near the font, except during the season of Easter. When parents are presented with a baptismal candle, they should not extinguish it until they have returned to their seat. The baptismal candle is meant to be lit on each anniversary of the child's baptism as a reminder that on this day he/she became a child of the light.
- 9 The paschal candle may also be used for funerals, in which case it is placed on its stand at the head of the coffin to remind the congregation of the scriptural promise that all who have been united with Christ in his death will certainly be united with him in his resurrection. Since in baptism 'we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him' (Rom 6:8).