

Core Content

1. What is worship?

In the first instance Christian worship is God's revelation of himself by his Word and actions. In worship God comes to his people and reveals his worth to them by what he says (the Word) and by what he does (the sacraments). The focus of Christian worship is the Lord Jesus Christ because through Jesus God most clearly shows his worth to human beings as the God who loves us, accepts us, forgives and cares for us.

The second aspect of Christian worship is our response to God's words and action' (God calls people to worship him, *LIFE*, BLS, 1998: 4). The dynamic of Christian worship is God's action and human response. It is a two-way communication, God reveals himself to people and they respond. God gives Christians grace and mercy. They respond in thanks, praise and devotion.

Core Content

2. What is Lutheran worship?

(a) Lutheran worship is Lutheran theology in action

Lutheran school worship will reflect Lutheran theology. It will reflect the emphasis on Christ's life, death and resurrection and what this has achieved for all people. It will highlight the central focus of Lutheran theology that is that the theology of the cross, justification by faith alone, law and gospel and the saved and sinful nature of Christians is emphasised. All messages are presented in the context of the Bible and Lutheran theology.

(b) Lutheran worship is scriptural

The Bible's message of law and gospel is the basis for Lutheran worship and its application. The biblical focus of worship is shown through the central placement of the Bible on the altar. The Bible is read and the Bible readings are the basis for the liturgy and the message.

In worship, the law and its impossible demands convicts the hearers and the gospel proclaims Christ as Saviour. The law can guide believers in discipleship for life but it must never be taught in isolation. The gospel message should also never be

reduced to moralising such as 'be nice, love one another, do not steal, do not tell lies, honour your parents'.

The gospel of forgiveness and the love of God through Jesus are always to be the chief themes of the message. The aim of the message should be to convict, comfort and challenge in the name of Christ! The gospel is then the source for sanctification; a life devoted to God's will. Threats such as 'be good or you'll go to hell' and bribes 'be good and you'll go to heaven' are false and unbiblical messages. Even though God's word of law is proclaimed in worship, the gospel is the foundation of Lutheran worship and the best motivation for dedicated Christian living.

(c) Lutheran worship is liturgical

Liturgy originally meant 'public service'. Liturgy can now often refer to the form, style and orders of some traditional worship. Worshippers see a leader. The leader has a special message. If the leaders are pastors they may have a white robe with a coloured sash around the shoulders. The worship area contains an altar, candles and special reading and preaching places. On the altar stands a cross (usually a crucifix) and an open Bible. All these have significance. A special order or ritual may be used. The Lutheran liturgy follows the division of the traditional church year, its seasons and festivals. These liturgical features are part of the Lutheran culture and help the school community to maintain its focus in worship on Christ and the Gospel.

The worship is similar in style to other traditional groups such as Uniting, Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican. Christian churches draw upon common prayers such as the Lord's Prayer and songs. Some of the elements of worship are even pre-Christian and derived from Judaistic traditions such as the architecture, priests, candles, robes and altar. The common aspects of the liturgy are a symbol of historical union with the universal (catholic) church. All worshippers can be conscious of unity with all Christians.

(d) Lutheran worship is ecumenical

School worship is a witness to Christian unity by the community. Lutherans form only a part of the Christian church, and because the Lutheran liturgy has strong relationships to other Christian groups, school worship is an ecumenical experience. ('Ecumenical' refers to the fellowship of all the world's saved.)

As long as the Word is used and the message is consistent with Lutheran theology, students, staff

and guests are welcome to lead and organise the worship experience. They can be encouraged to enrich Lutheran worship with forms and styles from their own tradition so that all may learn and benefit from each other. School pastors may also have a special responsibility to coordinate and supervise worship activities.

The varied faith backgrounds of staff and students means that non-Christians, atheists, and agnostics are among the worshippers. They are encouraged and expected to attend. The school worship will provide an avenue through which they can hear and be challenged with the gospel.

Core Content

3. What is going on in Lutheran worship?

(a) Worship is celebrating Christ

Lutheran worship recognises the concept of celebration. It ultimately aims to be positive and joyful before the Lord. In worship Lutherans are conscious of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and of his humble service and achievements. Christ is not used as a 'model' teacher or example of goodness, purity or selflessness. He is the suffering servant who died for the sins of all people, rose from death and is now Lord of all creation. Lutherans resist any attempt to focus on human beings to the exclusion of Christ. Worship is God-centred, not human-centred.

Lutheran worship, therefore, discourages any tendency to see the time as entertainment, a concert, a performance or a program of items. Anything that takes the glory from Christ and places it on a group, teacher or pastor is discouraged. The 'ego' submits in praise, shame and confession to Christ, Lord of all. Self-gratification is not an objective. Christ comes to each person in their weakness, vulnerability, lack of confidence and low self-esteem, and he offers a new and renewed life, total forgiveness and spiritual peace. No one deserves or earns this grace or becomes eligible for it by race, character or attitude.

(b) Worship is celebrating life!

Worship is life. Life is worship. In each moment of every day Christians are challenged to present themselves to God in spiritual worship. Christians live to the glory of God in all that they do. Lutherans say that communal worship is to be an expression

of total living. Communal worship strengthens and nourishes Christians for their daily tasks and relationships. The special worship times are the climax of the past days and an inspiration for future days. Christians do not 'switch God on' at worship time and then switch off when it is over. The daily routines of life, the daily tasks at home, and school, at work and in leisure time – all these are for the glory of God. Gritsch wrote that education and worship are the twin pillars of the church. 'They help us return to our baptism, to discern between gospel power and ego power, to strive for peace' (Gritsch, 1991: p.20).

(c) Worship is celebrating community

Worship is not a merely individual, personal, private affair. On regular occasions Christians come together to a sanctuary to worship together as one body. This is similar to the whole school gathering in the chapel or a single class turning its attention to a worship activity within the classroom. It is a natural expression of community. God, who can be worshipped anywhere, also chose special times and places for his people to come together.

Habel (1985) says that the community emphasis is a part of the learning experience, and can be seen as countering 'the tendency of many in Australia to view faith as a personal and private matter that is strictly 'between me and God' (Gritsch, 1991: p.10). Christians do not insist that worship is a matter of one's own business. It is the business of the whole community. Through worship the community is connected with the invisible communion of all God's people through time and space. The worship also anticipates the permanent community of heaven it is always eschatological (last times) – 'until I come'.

(d) Worship is sacramental celebration

The worshipping community is a sacramental group. It includes people who are baptised, and who attend the sacrament of the altar. Worship is sacramental because it is the worship of those who have been baptised and includes some that have tasted the body and blood of Christ.

Sacraments are central to the life of the Lutheran Church. Lutherans believe that baptism and holy communion were commanded by Christ for each believer. In the New Testament all new believers were baptised and attended holy communion. For Lutherans, the sacraments are the Word of God in visible form (water, bread, wine) and visible action. The Lutheran Church is a sacramental church similar to the Catholic and Anglican Churches.

The sacraments will be celebrated within Lutheran schools from time to time. The ministry of the school does include the expression of God's specific care and so the worship life of a Lutheran school may at times be an extension of the worship of an associated, local congregation and include the celebration of the sacraments. Schools also recognise the diverse faith backgrounds of students and believe the sacrament rituals are best conducted within the worship of the denominational group.

School worship should not be regarded as a simple substitute for worship experiences in the local denominations. The school supports the parents as primary educators in the Christian faith. The school is not a congregation in the full sense. School worship needs to affirm rather than undermine the role of the church outside the school. In the statement *The LCA and its schools* (LCA, 1999) the relationship between school and church in respect to worship is explored:

'The Lutheran Church of Australia confesses that worship of God is central to the life of the people of God in mission to the world of the school. Within the school such worship may be:

- Public worship of the faithful, involving the ministry of Word and Sacraments. This worship is open to all and will be organised to meet the needs of the school and the wider community.
- School or class devotional exercises which are part of the regular program of the whole school and which in different ways involve all students and staff' (*LCA and its schools*, LCA, 1999: #3.1).

Worship is also sacramental because it is mysterious. To worship means to honour, respect and glorify the Trinity. Much of God's nature and activity is incomprehensible. So worship contains a strong sense of the sacred, divine and holy. Christians approach worship with awe, joy, privilege, humility and dignity. 'The Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him' (Hab 2:20). This acknowledgment of the majesty, holiness and glory of God is emphasised in Lutheran worship. There is a sense of mystery and awe in worship.

Core Content

4. Why do I have to attend?

Attendance at most worship in Lutheran schools is compulsory. There are also optional worship experiences provided by some schools such as a

mid-week holy communion service at the beginning or close of the school day. Students and staff are invited but not required to attend these special worship activities. However the compulsory nature of most school and class worship activities raises questions which need further exploration.

Compulsory worship is questioned on two levels, educationally and theologically. Some question whether it is a valid and effective educational experience when it is made compulsory. Does it engender cynicism and negative attitudes in those who may not be able in good conscience to participate fully? Is it counter-productive? These views gather strength when anecdotal evidence is produced about past students who felt that religion was 'forced' on them in compulsory worship and who therefore subsequently turned away from spiritual activities in later life.

The practice of compulsory worship attendance is also questioned on theological grounds. The claim is that worship should be freely offered. It is a response to the free gift of justification by grace through faith. Is the practice of compulsory attendance a contradiction of the message of 'not by works but by faith', and *sola gratia* – grace alone? 'Worship that is enforced is no longer worship'. The theological issue is an important one and needs to be addressed.

In general, the older the students, the more prominent and acute the question of compulsory worship attendance becomes. Whatever the age of the students, their involvement in worship needs to be handled with respect for the individual's situation and conscience along with an unapologetic restatement of the school's position. Any questions and objections from the students should be handled honestly and sensitively. Staff members who express objections to being required to participate in worship also need to be aware of the school's expectation. Christian staff members are encouraged to be involved in worship and to provide a positive witness to the school community. Staff witness to the importance of worship in the time and significance they give to it.

So what support can be given for the principle of compulsory worship attendance at Lutheran schools?

(a) School worship is a community experience

Every class, year level or the whole school is an expression of community. In a community there is a strong expectation of conformity. All are involved. The creation and covenant people join together to honour and glorify the Trinity. School worship is worship in the world and before the world. In that

way it is different from congregational worship. The school is in God's general and specific care, and worship takes place in that context. Staff involvement in worship will also contribute to worship as an expression and experience of community.

There is anecdotal evidence of the positive effects on students and staff of school worship experiences (Bartsch, 1993: p.25). Some students who seriously questioned the wisdom of compulsory worship indicated years later that it was much more important to them than they realised at the time. Some even missed it! Some found it helpful and sustaining.

(b) School worship is an educational experience

Teaching and learning occurs in schools. Discovery and exploration are key process aims. The worship experience is provided as part of a comprehensive Christian education. Worship experiences are part of general education in Lutheran schools. In worship students hear the Bible's message as it is read and reflected upon and observe and experience Christian worship.

Worship, however, is an experience that always has a variety of effects on the participants. Some participants may hear and respond positively to the message, some may ignore or reject the message and some may even become negative or hostile.

Students also need opportunity to learn about Christian worship in Christian Studies. Through the exploration and investigation of the history, meaning and forms of Christian worship students can develop their understanding of the importance of worship for Christians and appreciate its significance for the church school.

(c) School worship is an institutional experience

'Compulsory worship' is probably an inaccurate phrase as there is a degree of choice involved.

- All families and students have the choice of being enrolled in a Lutheran school. This choice implies an acceptance of the school's requirement for students to attend worship activities.
- Students are not compelled to participate. All students and staff are invited to participate in worship but they are not expected to act against their conscience. It would be unethical and counterproductive to try to force students to pray or sing or make statements of belief. Students who experience respect with their

own faith position may be more likely to show respect for the school's position and practice of worship.

It must be stressed again that the school is not church, in the full sense. It is primarily an agency of the Church to educate, and as such is in the general area of God's care. The school is in the area, broadly, of law. It has rules, regulations and customs with which it chooses to operate. It is a formal educational institution for teaching and learning.

Core Content

5. Issues in worship for the community

(a) Worship leaders strive for excellence in worship

Those who prepare and lead worship have a special responsibility to make the messages and worship experience effective and meaningful. Worship leaders are encouraged to strive for excellence. Worship leaders in schools have many expectations demanding their time and energy but school worship needs to be creative, dynamic and meaningful to the community. Worship should be inclusive of the culture and needs of the students and bring the law and gospel to them in sensitive and challenging ways.

(b) School worship events must be relevant

School worship coordinators and leaders will seek feedback from the community about the school worship. Staff and students will often have valuable comments, which can be considered for worship practices. The challenge for relevance need not imply compromising the liturgy or the theology. The content must be biblical and theologically correct, but the methods, presentation and application should take into account the daily lives, culture and interests of the students, staff and others who may be present as well. The messages through Word, music, actions and illustrations should not simply communicate information but also motivate people to actively practice the implications and challenges of the message.

(c) Staff need to promote and display a positive view of school worship

When staff listen to students who are unhappy about worship they can also challenge students to a meaningful understanding of worship and positive attitude towards it. All staff can exercise a strong, constructive influence by helping students see that one can appreciate and participate in Christian worship without necessarily denying one's own, different spirituality.

(d) Worship is an opportunity for staff and student leadership training

Worship also provides a wonderful opportunity for new and committed Christians to put their faith into action and grow in their faith and confidence as God's gifted people.

(e) Quality resources are needed to match the high value of worship

Worship is vitally important in Lutheran schools and the budget and resources allocated to it need to reflect its importance. It can be a constant challenge for schools to provide resources that enable a consistently high standard of worship. Money and time allowances are needed in the development of a meaningful worship program. School pastors have a time allowance so they can prepare appropriate experiences. In secondary schools, the music and drama departments are crucial in the promotion of meaningful worship. Christians on staff are encouraged and needed for their contributions to worship in the school. Malcolm Bartsch writes

Worship provides an opportunity for the development of leaders in the school and community. Drama, public speaking, music and reading are all skills that can be used to enhance worship and leadership skills. The title of a devotion book *'My Utmost For His Highest'* reflects the goal of all worship presentations – excellence in worship. Students do not generally enjoy mediocrity, and they will appreciate the effort and preparation which leaders put into worship. All who offer or agree to lead in worship must be given training and support.

'The struggle to retain the importance of worship will always be there and more attention and resources need to be devoted to it. In fact, one might suggest that more attention should be given to this than any other part of the program of the school' (Bartsch, 1993: p.25).

Conclusion

Worship is the most obvious identification of a school as Lutheran. The fact that in some schools only a minority of staff and students are Lutheran makes it even more important as an expression of identity and ethos. Most importantly, it is a channel for the Holy Spirit to enlighten, sanctify and challenge the learning and believing community.

GOD GATHERS CHRISTIANS

TO WORSHIP HIM

WHAT IS CHRISTIAN WORSHIP?

The word 'worship' is related to 'worth-ship'. Worship deals with the question: What is of worth? In worship God's worth is proclaimed or revealed and God's worth is acknowledged.

GOD COMES TO US In the first instance Christian worship is God's revelation of himself by his word and actions. In worship God comes to his people and reveals his worth to them by what he says (the word) and by what he does (the sacraments). The focus of Christian worship is the Lord Jesus Christ because through Jesus God most clearly shows his worth to human beings as the God who loves us, accepts us, forgives us and cares for us.

WE RESPOND The second aspect of Christian worship is our response to God's words and actions. We recognise and acknowledge God's worth. Our response indicates what God is worth to us; we show by our words and actions that we believe God is worthy of praise, honour, loving obedience and willing service. We can pray to God for mercy and for all our needs. At the same time we acknowledge our own unworthiness (confession of sins).

We sometimes call our worship 'divine service' because in worship God serves us and this prompts us in turn to serve him. This highlights an essential difference between Christian and non-Christian worship: in non-Christian worship the initiative tends to be with the worshippers who try to establish the connection with their god and demonstrate their own worthiness by the earnestness and intensity of their prayers and other ritual acts (contrast the worship of the prophets of Baal with that of Elijah, 1 Kings 18:16-39; also the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14).

WORSHIP IN THE BIBLE The basic pattern of worship outlined above can be seen already in the Old Testament. When people like Noah and Abraham build altars and 'call on the name of the Lord', this follows some

gracious action of God (saving Noah, calling Abraham). In the Old Testament times the special places of worship were places where God had 'appeared' — made himself known. Although the people of God knew that God could not be confined to a building (2 Chronicles 6:18), God nevertheless instructed them to erect first the tabernacle and later the temple as his 'house' where he would graciously come to be with them. The Israelites were also given special times for worship. On the sabbath day they were to put aside their work and remember the mighty work of God as their Creator and Rescuer (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15). Every day by their sacrifices they were to honour the God who had set them apart to be his own covenant

people. There also special worship festivals which focused on God's merciful deliverance (eg Passover, Day of Atonement).

The New Testament begins with Jesus and his disciples observing

the worship pattern of Israel. However, like the prophets in the Old Testament, Jesus called for worship that was not mere empty ritual but was sincere devotion (Matthew 6:5-13; 15:1-9), 'in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24). As God in human flesh, Jesus himself is the New Testament tabernacle and temple — the 'place' where God's glory is fully revealed (John 1:14; 2:19-21). Jesus promised his followers that he would be present even when only two or three of them came together in his name (Matthew 18:20). Christian worship is not restricted to certain rituals at particular places and times (Colossians 2:16). The sabbath having fulfilled its purpose, Sunday came to be observed as 'the Lord's day'. On this day Christians celebrate God's supreme work of deliverance through the death and resurrection of Christ. Luther explains what the third commandment means for Christians:

... we should not despise God's word or refuse to hear it. Instead, we should recognise that God's word is holy and be glad to hear and learn it. (*Luther's Small Catechism*, Openbook edition 1996)

In worship God comes to his people to strengthen them, prepare them to be his servants, and encourage them to love one another and share his gifts.
Theological Foundations of LIFE Curriculum