

1 **Report of the Committee on Evangelical Lutheran Synod Worship**

2
3 **19 September 2011**

4 5 **Purpose Statement**

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7 At the 93rd annual Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (2010) a memorial
8 was submitted regarding “Liturgical Forms and Ceremonies—Bylaw.” Three reasons were
9 given for the submission of the memorial: 1) The synod from its earliest days sought unity of
10 liturgical form by its member congregations; 2) Liturgical forms are to be orthodox; 3) There is
11 confusion regarding the meaning and application of Bylaw Chapter I of the 1986 E.L.S.
12 Constitution (*2010 Synod Report*, pp. 153-154). It was resolved by the Synod “that the 2010
13 General Pastoral Conference be asked...to discuss a procedure by which the scope and
14 implications of Bylaws Chapter I can be clarified...” (*2010 Synod Report*, p. 154). In keeping
15 with this resolution, the Synod’s Presidium was asked by the 2010 General Pastoral Conference
16 to form an ad hoc committee to study Bylaws Chapter I and bring a report to the 2011 General
17 Pastoral Conference. The “Committee on Evangelical Lutheran Synod Worship” now submits
18 its report.

19 20 **Introduction**

21
22 The basis of true concord among us in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod is our mutual adherence
23 to the Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God, and to the Confessions of the Evangelical
24 Lutheran Church as a faithful testimony of the truth of the Holy Scriptures. These Confessions
25 articulate a Biblically-based theology of worship that guides Christians in the use or non-use of
26 specific liturgical forms and ceremonies.

27
28 The Augsburg Confession declares that “it can easily be judged that if the churches observed
29 ceremonies correctly, their dignity would be maintained and reverence and piety would increase
30 among the people” (AC, Introduction to Part Two: 6, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, p.
31 45; cf. Ps. 96:1-9). The Apology expresses the Lutheran conviction that “ceremonies should be
32 celebrated to teach people Scripture, that those admonished by the Word may conceive faith and
33 godly fear, and may also pray” (Ap XXIV:3, CTLC p. 220; cf. John 8:31-32). The Formula of
34 Concord declares that “useless, foolish displays that are not profitable for good order, Christian
35 discipline, or evangelical practice in the church...are not genuine adiaphora, or matters of
36 indifference” (FC SD X:7, CTLC p. 598; cf. 1 Cor. 14:26c, 40). And while the Formula does
37 recognize that “the community of God in every place and every time has, according to its
38 circumstances, the good right, power, and authority to change and decrease or increase
39 ceremonies,” it also teaches that churches “should do this thoughtfully and without giving
40 offense, in an orderly and appropriate way, whenever it is considered most profitable, most
41 beneficial, and best for good order, Christian discipline, and the Church’s edification” (FC SD
42 X:9, CTLC p. 598; cf. 1 Cor. 10:23).

43
44 Confessional Lutheranism’s balanced approach toward such matters is evangelical and pastoral
45 in motivation, while also being generally conservative in application. The Apology bears witness
46 to this defining trait of the Church of the Lutheran Reformation when it states: “We believe that

47 the true unity of the Church is not injured by dissimilar ceremonies instituted by humans...
48 However, it is pleasing to us that, for the sake of peace, universal ceremonies are kept. We also
49 willingly keep the order of the Mass in the churches, the Lord's Day, and other more famous
50 festival days. With a very grateful mind we include the beneficial and ancient ordinances,
51 especially since they contain a discipline. This discipline is beneficial for educating and training
52 the people and those who are ignorant" (Ap VII/VIII:33, CTLC p. 149; cf. 1 Thess. 5:21-22).

53
54 A mutual agreement in these Scripturally-based theological principles is a part of the unity in
55 doctrine that we cherish in the ELS.

56
57 At the same time, because of the diversity that exists among us in backgrounds and experience, it
58 is necessary for us to be sensitive to the subtle differences that may be present in the ways that
59 we understand the concepts, terms and language we use. For example, terms like "liturgy,"
60 "contemporary," and "traditional," may be defined or used in our midst in more than one way.
61 Such differences never should be allowed to sever the unity we enjoy in the chief article of
62 Justification. "For the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree about the doctrine of the
63 Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, that
64 is, rites or ceremonies instituted by men, should be the same everywhere. As Paul says, 'One
65 Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all' (Ephesians 4:5-6)" (AC VII: 2-4, CTLC
66 p. 34).

67
68 Historically, and in contemporary American Lutheranism, the governing documents of other
69 American synods usually do not recommend specific orders of worship for use by their
70 congregations. In contrast, a feature of the ELS—and of its predecessor body, the old Norwegian
71 Synod—is that we place a high value on fostering and maintaining liturgical unity. This is seen
72 in our bylaw concerning Liturgical Forms and Ceremonies, Chapter 1, which recommends
73 specific orders of worship for use in our congregations.

74
75 Those who framed our synod's by-laws understood the relationship between the chief article and
76 liturgical practice. They articulated the expectation that, as in all matters of adiaphora,
77 congregations can be asked, when it is practicable, to conform to that which is judged
78 collectively to be best for the synod as a whole—as long as there is no spirit of compulsion or
79 coercion in areas where God's Word teaches that a spirit of Christian love and deference should
80 prevail instead.

81 82 **The By-Law**

83 84 **1986 By-laws of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod**

85 *Chapter 1—Liturgical Forms and Ceremonies*

86 In order to preserve unity in liturgical forms and ceremonies, the Synod recommends to its
87 congregations that they use the Order of Worship based on the Danish-Norwegian liturgy of
88 1685 and agenda of 1688, or the Common Order of Worship, as each congregation may decide.
89 (68th Report Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod June 16-21, 1985, p. 102 ff,
90 adoption, p. 151, Ratification, 1986 Report, p.150. Subsequently printed in *Handbook of the*
91 *Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, including amendments.)

92

93 ✦ “*In order to preserve unity in liturgical forms and ceremonies...*”

94 The bylaw seeks to maintain the blessing of unity among our ELS congregations as expressed in
95 matters of worship. This by-law addresses what might be called a “fraternal debt of love.” This is
96 in keeping with what St. Paul teaches concerning such matters in Romans 13:8. Liturgical forms
97 and ceremonies as such do not produce unity among us, neither do they guarantee an orthodox
98 confession on all points of doctrine. This is not their purpose. We place our confidence in God’s
99 justification of the sinner by grace through faith in Christ alone. This is the power by which
100 doctrinal unity is built and maintained in the Church. Agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel in
101 all its articles, and in the correct administration of the sacraments, produces a unity throughout
102 the Church in areas of teaching and practice, which can be expressed outwardly in commonly-
103 used liturgical forms and ceremonies that testify to the chief article. In this way, the practice of
104 orthodox liturgical forms and ceremonies helps to preserve a common orthodox confession
105 among us.

106 ✦ “*...recommends...*”

107 The term “recommends” is stronger than the term “suggests,” yet weaker than the term
108 “mandates.” The term “recommends” indicates that the unity of the church is not broken when
109 cases of special pastoral need or the unique contours of a specific local circumstance would call
110 for only a partial implementation of what is being recommended.

111
112 Those who speak on behalf of the synod, and who are in positions of oversight and instruction
113 within the synod, are obligated to recommend, in the name of the synod, what the bylaw
114 recommends. This ongoing recommendation would encourage congregations to engage in a
115 careful and thoughtful evaluation of the bylaw, and of the pastoral and theological principles that
116 stand behind it.

117 ✦ “*...based on...*”

118 The bylaw recommends the use of two specific, recognizable liturgical blueprints or patterns for
119 worship in regular Sunday services in the synod’s congregations. These “blueprints,” more
120 broadly considered, also include orders of Matins, Vespers, and other occasional services that
121 complement and supplement the chief Sunday service. Services for special events or observances
122 are not necessarily within the purview of the bylaw.

123
124 In keeping with the precedent of the old Norwegian Synod, the ELS originally recommended just
125 one order of service, namely the order based upon the historic Danish-Norwegian Liturgy.
126 During the last century the pertinent bylaw was expanded to include a form of the Common
127 Service, reflecting the growing use of that liturgical order in our synod. The main resources used
128 when the bylaw was written in 1986 would have included *The Lutheran Hymnary* (1913), *The*
129 *Liturgical Service of the Lutheran Church* (Dahle, 1922), *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941), and the
130 accompanying altar books. Since 1986, updated versions of the order of worship based on the
131 historic Danish-Norwegian liturgy, and of the Common Service, have been published in the
132 *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (1996). Updated versions of the Common Service have been
133 published in *Lutheran Worship* (1982), in *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (1993), and in
134 *Lutheran Service Book* (2006). All these hymnals are, or have been, used within the ELS. The
135 bylaw recommended two specific liturgical patterns and sequences of texts that, while close to

136 each other in many respects, were also distinct enough to require the special mention of each. A
137 thoughtful comparison of current usages with the received texts of the two orders will determine
138 the extent to which local practice is, in fact, based on, related to or derived from the texts
139 recommended in the bylaw.

140 ✠ “...as each congregation may decide.”

141 No humanly-devised forms, rites, or ceremonies may ever be imposed as necessary for
142 justification, or as binding on the conscience in themselves. But at the same time, our
143 congregations as voluntary participants in the synod (an “assembly” which “walks together”) can
144 be expected to use forms, rites and ceremonies, in the proclamation of the Gospel and in the
145 administration of the Sacraments, that reflect and testify to the fraternal unity that exists between
146 those who preach the same Gospel and administer the same Sacraments.

147 **Conclusion**

148 The two orders of service that are mentioned in the bylaw, in their received texts, faithfully offer
149 and facilitate the following benefits:

- 152 1. They conserve and testify to “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints”
153 (Jude 3), as they set forth without ambiguity the changeless Gospel of Jesus Christ
154 (Hebrews 13:7-9).
- 155 2. They establish a framework for a clear proclamation of the Gospel and a reverent
156 administration of the Sacraments (Hebrews 12:28,29).
- 157 3. They serve a proper catechetical purpose, in that they instruct God’s people even as
158 they guide them in prayer, so that they are led to desire the Sacrament of the Altar,
159 and to desire an ever fuller participation in and with Christ and His church, in heaven
160 and on earth (Colossians 3:16).

161
162 Worship forms that are based on or derived from the received text of these recommended orders
163 of service—even if they do not reproduce these orders of service in an exacting manner—would
164 still be expected to retain in a clearly-recognizable way these three Biblically-based features of
165 Lutheran worship.

166
167 Respectfully submitted,

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169 Committee on Evangelical Lutheran Synod Worship

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171 Committee Members

172 Rev. Steven Sparley, Co-Chairman

173 Rev. David Russow, Co-Chairman

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