



Worship Formation & Liturgical Resources: Frequently Asked Questions

How can we celebrate congregational anniversaries within worship?

The worship staff receives a number of similar inquiries on worship-related topics from across the church.

These responses should not be considered the final word on the topic, but useful guides that are to be considered in respect to local context with pastoral sensitivity.

The response herein may be reproduced for congregational use as long as the web address is cited on each copy.

Christian celebrations of anniversaries (baptism, ordination, marriage, or congregational) are occasions for thanksgiving for past blessings that God has given, increasing awareness of what God is doing in the present, and hopeful expectation for what God will do in the future.

There are many ways congregational anniversaries can be celebrated: historical programs, forums, musical concerts, and dinners. This essay focuses specifically on how a congregation can mark its anniversary liturgically within the context of a worship service. It is most appropriate to celebrate an anniversary within a service of Holy Communion. Because congregations are first and foremost assemblies of God's people around Word and Sacrament, marking your anniversary within a eucharistic celebration is most appropriate. The Sunday service of Holy Communion is ideal.

Below are other suggestions for an Anniversary Celebration within worship:

- *A hymn, choral work, dance, or piece of functional liturgical art could be commissioned.*
With at least one year's preparation, a hymn, a choral piece, a work of dance, or piece of functional liturgical art (such as communion vessels, vestments, or processional cross) can be commissioned. The commissioned works may be used for the first time during the anniversary liturgy. Commissioning liturgical items rather than purchasing them from a catalog allows the congregation to have beautiful, handcrafted, one-of-a-kind items made to suit its needs. Such commissioned items may be dedicated as part of the worship service. See *Blessing of Worship Furnishings in Occasional Services for the Assembly*, p. 165.
- *Invite the synodical bishop to participate in the liturgy.*
For a significant anniversary (25th, 50th, 100th), consider inviting the synodical bishop to participate. As chief pastor of the synod, it is appropriate for the bishop to preach, preside, pronounce the blessing, or simply give greetings.

- *Invite clergy, deaconesses, diaconal ministers, musicians, and associates in ministry who have served the congregation in the past, or former members who have become church leaders to take part in the liturgy.*
They might serve as lay readers, preachers, guest musicians, or in other appropriate ways. They may also be invited to attend the liturgy without any special leadership role. Although it is always appropriate to have a guest leader, one of the present pastors of the congregation preaches or presides at the service.
- *Founding or long-time members may be invited to serve in the liturgy.*
They may serve as lectors, assisting ministers, communion ministers or in other appropriate roles.
- *Consider using materials from the Anniversary of a Congregation outline in Occasional Services, pp. 123-124.* This includes a Prayer of the Day, Gospel acclamation, possible readings, and an additional petition for the prayers of intercession, a prayer after communion, and a sending. Hymn suggestions are also included (see below).
- *Consider using the rite of Affirmation of the Vocation as part of the sending* (ELW p. 84; *Leaders Desk Edition* p. 155). This rite may be slightly modified for use with the entire congregation. It is ideal for use on such occasions, because it calls the congregation to celebrate its anniversary by re-dedicating itself to its primary mission-serving Christ in the world. It will also remind the congregation that the "church" being celebrated in the anniversary observance is primarily God's people in mission, rather than the church building that houses them.

When celebrating an anniversary within a service of Holy Communion, the lectionary texts appointed for the Sunday and the liturgical color of the season are normally used. An additional prayer of the day may be used immediately following the appointed prayer for the day. (*Occasional Services*, p. 123).

Use special intercessions for the continued ministry of the congregation within the prayers of the church. A suitable intercession might be:

Eternal God, we give thanks to you for the members and the ministry of this congregation: for those who had the vision to found this congregation, those who sustain its present ministry, and those who will carry its mission forward into the future. (*Occasional Services*. p. 123)

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

For further prayers and a benediction suitable to an anniversary celebration, see *Occasional Services*, p.123-124.

The following are suggested hymns for anniversary celebrations:

- ♪ 503-505 A Mighty Fortress Is Our God
- ♪ 524 What is This Place
- ♪ 526 God is Here!
- ♪ 532 Gather Us In
- ♪ 548 Rise, O Church, like Christ Arisen

♪ 576	We All Are One in Mission
♪ 579	Lord, you give the great commission
♪ 632	O God, Our Help in Ages Past
♪ 633	We've Come This Far by Faith
♪ 645	Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation
♪ 647	Glorious Things of you are Spoken
♪ 652	Built on a Rock
♪ 654	The Church's One Foundation
♪ 665	Rise, Shine, You People
♪ 671	Shine, Jesus, Shine
♪ 710	One Bread, One Body
♪ 733	Great is Thy Faithfulness
♪ 760	O Christ the Same
♪ 812, 813	Faith of Our Fathers
♪ 839,840	Now Thank We All Our God
♪ 864	Praise, My Soul, the God of Heaven
♪ 873	Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart!

Other general hymns of praise and thanksgiving would be appropriate as well as hymns that reflect themes in the lectionary texts.

It may be appropriate to search congregational archives to locate service folders from building dedications or other pivotal events in the life of the congregation and use some of the hymns that were sung then.

RESOURCES

[Resources Available from Augsburg Fortress:](#)

📖 *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Occasional Services for the Assembly.*
Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009.

📖 *Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Leaders Desk Edition.* Minneapolis. Augsburg Fortress, 2006

Revised January 2013

Copyright © 2013 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. www.elca.org/worshipfaq.

This document may be reproduced for use in your congregation as long as the copyright notice appears on each copy.