



Worship Formation & Liturgical Resources: Frequently Asked Questions

Should we offer more than one service?

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.

Many congregations have found that adding services to their worship schedule seems to attract more people. Indeed, statistics tell us that any additional worship opportunity will bring more people, especially if what is added is different from the "regular" service, not only in form or style, but also in time or day of the week. That increase is exactly why many support a "menu" approach to worship. They believe it is important to offer as many different styles and options as possible. The variety will, no doubt, attract more people, and bringing in more people is a benefit that is faithful to the goal of the proclamation of the gospel.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America worship staff, however, has some concerns about this approach. Especially in a small congregation, splitting the existing assembly into smaller groups in order to attract a few more people may cause real damage in the long run. Ideally, a congregation's worship is a powerful expression of the common faith of the Christian community. Gathering as large a number of people as possible means that the liturgy is sung and spoken with confidence. Splitting the congregation might diminish the quality of the worship and might actually have a negative effect on a visitor or seeker.

If one understands the liturgy as the central event of a congregation's life, the liturgy should unify, not divide the congregation. More than any other activity, the regular gathering around God's Word and Holy Communion brings members together. In that way, the Sunday liturgy connects evangelism, social ministry, stewardship, education, fellowship and all other areas of parish life. Splitting a congregation into worshipping groups based on personal preferences may lessen the power of the liturgy to unify. It also denies the catholicity of the church. If worship options are based on personal tastes, demographics, or "market segmentation," where will the church express its unity by gathering as one people?

In many ways, the Christian community is called upon to challenge current cultural values. The culture tells us that we reach people by targeting specific audiences. In the culture of the individual, the value of each person trumps the value of community. Social media can forge community but it can also reinforce this individualism. Christian community expresses a whole, a diverse community joined in their baptism to the people of God.

It would not be appropriate to say that a congregation should never offer more than one regularly scheduled worship service a week. Sometimes there are simply too many people for a single worship service. Two or more services can still express the unity of the community when the basic structure and texts of the liturgies remain consistent, even with different musical styles. Keeping to the basic shape of the liturgy accentuates this consistency. See *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* pp. 92-93 and [“What is the pattern of worship?”](#).

Certainly, congregations can benefit from renewing worship and seeking to revitalize their worship with new music. In some ELCA congregations, liturgical and musical life has become monotonous and lacks vibrant participation by the worshipping assembly. A broadening and enlivening of the musical repertoire in worship is a worthwhile goal, not only for the visitor, but also for the regular worshiper. (see also, [“How do we introduce new music to our congregation?”](#)). Not only can revitalized worship appeal to a wider range of personal tastes, it can also convey a means of expressing the very nature of the church. Music and all the arts powerfully convey God’s Word as that Word forms and renews faith. Imagine one worship service centered in Word and Sacrament, based on the structure of our inherited liturgy, celebrated with graciousness, reverence and natural hospitality. Such a service might juxtapose German and English hymns, chant, contemporary song, and music from all corners of the global church. Such a revitalized worship event:

- reflects the whole church, not just one piece of it,
- conveys Lutheran theological and liturgical tradition,
- is consistent with ecumenical practice as it focuses on Christian unity,
- engages both long-time members and visitors,
- utilizes a variety of music that reflects the diversity of the church.

While making decisions about adding services that offer stylistic options, congregational leaders must carefully consider the overall long-term implications of their choices for the life of the congregation.

One fitting metaphor for our worship is the wedding feast of God, where all are invited by the messenger who goes out to the highways and byways, calling all to attend the one banquet. Those who are truly hungry and thirsty will not seek to gather only with those of similar preference, but will join with all believers to enjoy the rich feeding that God offers.

RESOURCES

Frequently Asked Questions:

- ↪ How do we introduce new music to our congregation?
- ↪ How is worship traditional? How is worship contemporary?
- ↪ What are the biblical roots of worship?
- ↪ What is the pattern of worship?
- ↪ What is the role of music in worship?

Resources Available for Download on the ELCA Website:

- 📖 *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997. (Available in English and Spanish)
- 📖 *Principles for Worship.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002. (Available in English and Spanish)
- 🎥 *These Things Matter: Word, Baptism, Communion.* Division for Congregational Ministries, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. 1999. Video on sacramental practices.
- 🎧 *Worship Formation Study Modules.* ELCA Worship Staff. Sessions that may help a congregation dig deeper into many aspects of worship.
- 📞 *Open Questions in Worship.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.
 - Volume 1: "What are the essentials of Christian worship?"
 - Volume 2: "What is 'contemporary' worship?"
 - Volume 3: "How does worship evangelize?"

Resources Available from Augsburg Fortress:

- 📖 Brugh, Lorraine S. and Gordon W. Lathrop. *Using Evangelical Lutheran Worship: The Sunday Assembly.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008.
- 📖 Burke, Suzanne and Martin Seltz, eds., *Worship Matters: An Introduction to Worship* Augsburg Fortress, 2012. (Leader edition and Participant edition also available separately).
- 📖 Rimbo, Robert. *Why Worship Matters.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004.
- 📖 Wengert, Timothy J., *Centripetal Worship: The Evangelical Heart of Lutheran Worship.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007.

Other Resources

- 📖 [Changing Styles of Worship](#). Alban Institute. May 2005.
- 📖 Long, Thomas G. [Beyond the Worship Wars: Building Vital and Faithful Worship](#). The Alban Institute, 2001.

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.