

GUIDELINES FOR CONGREGATIONAL AND PASTORAL PRACTICE

LUTHERAN CHURCH—CANADA

On a number of occasions there have been requests from pastors and congregations, as well as from district presidents, for guidelines that might contribute to greater uniformity of practice within the congregations of Lutheran Church—Canada. The paragraphs which follow are an attempt to respond to that request. These guidelines have been shared with the CTCR for advice and comment, and approved by the Council of Presidents. It is the responsibility of each district president to determine their dissemination and application within his district.

The guidelines that are offered flow from several essential presuppositions:

1. We accept and build on the concept of church fellowship as presented in the CTCR document, "The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship". We, therefore, distinguish between that fellowship which all believers share on the basis of faith in Christ, and external unity in the church on the basis of agreement in doctrine and practice.
2. We share a mutual desire to be faithful to God's Word, not demanding more than it requires nor accepting less. We recognize that many specific congregational and pastoral decisions cannot always be based on precise biblical commands or prohibitions.
3. We are a *Synod*, a fellowship of those who have freely chosen to walk together. The guidelines, therefore, do not have the force of law, but are an appeal to the common commitment of members of the Synod. For some, following these guidelines will mean voluntary restrictions on what, in Christian liberty, they might otherwise wish to do. Others will need to respect the freedom of those who, in the exercise of Christian liberty, choose a particular course of action.
4. The objective of these guidelines is not compliance with laws, but greater uniformity in practice. This objective does not reduce or eliminate the need for responsible pastoral care and decision-making. The supervision of the doctrine and life of the members of the Synod remains the responsibility of the appropriate district president.

I. Holy Communion

1. Our synodical position with respect to Holy Communion is one of close (d) communion. We believe this to be in accord with Holy Scripture and consistent with the historical practice of the Christian church. (*Closed Communion in Contemporary Context*. Adopted LCC 1999) This position should be reflected in bulletin paragraphs, communion cards, verbal announcements, etc. There should be no "open" invitation to commune.
2. When a congregation celebrates Holy Communion, the officiant is to be an ordained clergyman, normally the pastor of the congregation.
3. The ordinary participants in a congregational celebration of Holy Communion are the confirmed/communing members of that congregation, and such others who may be under the spiritual care of the pastor and congregation (e.g. students, long-term visitors).
4. Communing by visitors may be permitted but should not be specifically encouraged.

5. Confirmed/communing members of other LCC and LCMS congregations are invited to commune as guests when the pastor is satisfied as to their eligibility. This determination may be delegated to elders or others. (Note: "worthiness" is a matter of faith, not outward criteria, and can therefore never adequately be determined by another.)
6. Confirmed members of other Lutheran churches who are in good standing within their own congregation may be permitted to commune as guests only "in situations of emergency and in special cases of pastoral care". Such families should be informed, however, that their infants and very young children may not partake of Holy Communion.
7. Christians belonging to other denominations (or non-Christians) should in no case be invited to attend.
8. Assuming that the position of LCC has been clearly enunciated, adults who unexpectedly present themselves at the altar should not be denied Communion, especially if their identity or confession are unknown. The single exception would be if adults are intentionally challenging the practice of the congregation or involving their infants in doing so.
9. In cases where non-LCC/LCMS visitors do commune, it is the pastor's responsibility to ensure that, if at all possible, such visitors are subsequently contacted and given an explanation of the doctrine and practice of the Lord's Supper to which the congregation is committed.
10. Pastors and congregations should work together to find ways of restoring responsible Communion practice within the congregation. This includes proper instruction in confirmation and Bible classes, use of confession and absolution prior to "announcement/registration" of Communion.
11. To reduce the likelihood of small children partaking of Communion, we discourage the practice by which communicants help themselves to an individual cup on the way to the altar.
12. For guidelines regarding the holding of Communion services apart from the regular congregational worship service, consult the LCC CTR document, "*Extra-Congregational Communion Services*," September, 1992

II. Holy Baptism

1. The sacrament of Holy Baptism, whether for an infant or an adult, should ordinarily be administered within the context of a regular congregational worship service.
2. Baptism must never be divorced from the Great Commission (*Matthew 28, 20*). Thus, Christian education must follow the baptism of infants and precede as well as follow the baptism of adults.
3. In their desire that parents take their parental responsibility seriously, pastors should avoid becoming legalistic in the demands they make on parents as a precondition of baptizing their children.
4. A pastor should not baptize a child without the consent of at least one parent or legal guardian.
5. In our day of broken families it is imperative that the pastor be satisfied that the parent or legal guardian bringing the child for baptism (if such be the case) has the legal freedom to do so.

6. Baptism is to be administered only "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". No formula which fails to include these names is to be used.
7. Except in cases of emergency, the pastor of the congregation is the normal person to administer Holy Baptism. Other clergy who are relatives or special friends of the baptismal candidate should never presume the right to baptize, but should have the specific consent of the congregation and its pastor. It is the responsibility of the baptismal candidate or his/her parents to request such consent from the pastor of the congregation.
8. When an infant is baptized in an emergency situation, the pastor should secure the name of the person who performed the baptism as well as the names of witnesses. As soon as possible the pastor is encouraged to use in the public worship the order of service, "Recognition by the Church of an Emergency Baptism."

III. Weddings

1. Since marriage was instituted by God as a lifelong union of one man and one woman, no pastor will preside at a ceremony for same-sex couples.
2. A wedding service, performed by a pastor, should be regarded as a worship service inasmuch as the means of grace are employed.
3. A wedding service should ordinarily be performed only by the pastor of the congregation in which at least one party to the marriage holds membership, or is under the spiritual care of the pastor.
4. If another pastor is involved in the service itself, this should be at the invitation of the host pastor.
5. Any other pastor(s) participating in the wedding service should belong to LCC or a church body in fellowship with LCC.
6. If other pastors not of our fellowship are to have a role in the wedding, it should be outside the parameters of the service itself (e.g. after the service, in church, at the reception, etc.) They should not be vested.
7. As pastors not in fellowship with LCC do not participate in wedding services of our congregations, so our pastors should not participate in wedding services of congregations not in fellowship with us.
8. Celebration of Holy Communion in connection with a wedding service should ordinarily be discouraged, unless this can take place with full respect for the Synod's Communion practice and without giving offense to anyone.

IV. Funerals

1. A funeral service performed by a pastor should be regarded as a worship service inasmuch as the means of grace are employed. The appropriate place for the funeral of a Christian is in a church and not in a funeral home.

2. When a new pastor arrives in a community it is advisable for him to meet with the funeral director(s) in his community to discuss our church's practices.
3. The ministry of the Lutheran pastor should ordinarily be limited to cases where the individual died in the faith.
4. In those instances where the faith of the departed is unknown and where unique family or public considerations provide a vital opportunity for evangelical ministry, the pastor may conduct such a funeral. He should take extra care to apply law and gospel correctly and should take whatever steps he can to avoid giving offense. Prior to making a decision whether or not to officiate at the funeral of a non-member, the pastor should ordinarily first consult with his elders.
5. It is not in the best Christian tradition to eulogize the departed, especially if the eulogy conveys the message that the good works of the departed offer comfort in the face of death. It may be appropriate, however, for a family member or friend to say a few words by way of a personal tribute, provided this does not detract from the pastor's proclamation of law and gospel.
6. Clergy who are responsible for conducting the service should only be those whose churches are in church fellowship.

V. Uniformity in matters relating to church membership

It is important to have uniformity in terminology and practice regarding church membership in the congregations of Lutheran Church—Canada. This eliminates confusion and gives a clearer understanding of the action which has taken place. The following are some commonly used terms and practices:

1. Reception into membership:
 - A. By Baptism
 - B. By Confirmation/affirmation of faith
Those who publicly affirm their faith after receiving instruction
 - C. By profession of faith
Those received into membership from a Lutheran congregation not in fellowship with Lutheran Church—Canada. The former congregation is generally notified of this action.
 - D. By reaffirmation of faith
Those received into membership who were formerly members of a Lutheran congregation in fellowship with Lutheran Church—Canada. The former congregation is generally notified of this action.

- E. By transfer
Those received by a letter of transfer from a Lutheran congregation in fellowship with Lutheran Church—Canada. The former congregation is notified if/when those transferred are officially received into membership.

2. Termination of membership:

A. By transfer

Those given a letter of transfer who wish to join another Lutheran congregation in fellowship with Lutheran Church—Canada. The receiving congregation will notify the former congregation if/when those transferred are officially received into membership.

B. By release

When a letter of release is given to a member who has left the Synod for a congregation not in fellowship with Lutheran Church—Canada. A letter of commendation may be included.

C. Whereabouts unknown

Members whose whereabouts are unknown and cannot be established with a period of time designated by the congregation's bylaws, may be removed from the membership list of the congregation and placed in a file designated "Whereabouts Unknown."

D. By self-exclusion

A member who refuses to worship and receive the sacrament over a period of time after evangelical admonishment to do so, may be notified that he/she has excluded him/herself from membership in the congregation and all the rights and privileges connected therewith.

E. By excommunication

A member who conducts his/her life in an unchristian manner (Galatians 5:19-21) and has been admonished according to Matthew 18:15-20, but refuses to amend his/her sinful life, may be removed from the membership by action of the congregation. He/she thereby is excluded from all the rights and privileges of membership in the congregation.

F. By death

VI. Ministerial Associations

Pastors may participate actively in local or regional ministerial associations provided that:

- 1) they are indeed associations of clergy and not councils of churches. If they are councils of churches, cooperation must be limited to "*in externis*".
- 2) participating clergy are able to avoid taking part in "sacramental rites and practices" of heterodox churches.
- 3) the congregations which the pastors serve do not become identified with a particular cause or position without freely choosing to do so.

- 4) they have opportunity to testify to the truth of the gospel and the witness of the Holy Scriptures.

VII. Community Events of a Religious Nature

These events may be of two kinds, although the distinctions are not absolute.

1. Events in which the means of grace (Word and/or sacrament) are *essential* to the event, as distinct from *incidental* to the event. Thus it would be difficult to conceive of a "worship service" (whatever the occasion) without the reading of Scripture and probably a sermon.
2. Events in which the means of grace are *incidental* to the event. Thus it would be possible to hold a musical concert or an educational event in which the Word of God may be read, but the reading of the Word is not essential to the event.

Although the use or non-use of the means of grace provides the critical point of distinction, other factors might contribute to that distinction. For example, where is the event held - in a church or at the lake-side? Who are the people that have gathered - one or more congregations, or the public at large? Who is conducting the event - only vested clergy, or non-vested clergy or laity?

1. If the Word and/or sacrament event is to be inter-denominational, and the doctrinal position of participants will be marked by a mixture of truth and error, the Lutheran Church-Canada pastor should not participate in a formal way, i.e. he should not take a visible part in the event. The LCC congregation should not host or co-host such an event.
2. If the LCC congregation is solely responsible for the conduct of a Word and/or sacrament event, and it is conducted only by LCC pastors (or by those in fellowship with LCC), it is proper, perhaps even desirable to invite other churches to attend.
3. If Word and/or sacrament are not essential to the event, congregations should feel free to make their decision concerning participation based on the opportunities afforded for sharing the Gospel and the sensitivities of their sister churches.
4. A congregation or pastor contemplating participation in a community event of a religious nature should seek the advice of the district president or the circuit counsellor before making a decision.
5. Providing the above guidelines do not prevent participation, pastors are encouraged to take advantage of opportunities to make a public confession of the Gospel to the community.

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