

## ACELC 7 Theses on Worship<sup>1</sup>

### Prologue:

**“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”<sup>2</sup>**

**“Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”<sup>3</sup>**

**“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”<sup>4</sup>**

**“O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise.”<sup>5</sup>**

Our Lord is the Lord who serves. Pursuant to the above words, and Christ's words to the Samaritan woman at the well — **“The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”<sup>6</sup>** — the ACELC fraternally offers the following Theses as the conviction and unanimous confession of the member congregations that these are the things which constitute orthodox Christian worship in harmony with Holy Scripture and The Lutheran Confessions. We submit these to the Church, and specifically the member congregations of the LCMS, as embodying the truths regarding worship by which any congregation (or larger gathering) would in truth call themselves Lutheran.

### Thesis 1<sup>7</sup>

**WE CONFESS** that worship is the Triune God's service to us, His Royal Priesthood of the Baptized<sup>8</sup>, and our God-given responses to His grace-filled

1 Unanimously adopted by the ACELC Representatives at the General Meeting in Cedar Falls, IA, on February 27, 2014.

2 Mark 10:45; Matthew 20:28 (All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless noted.)

3 Matthew 11:28

4 John 17:20f

5 Psalm 51:15

6 John 4:23f

7 The ACELC is indebted to the 1995-96 “6 Theses on Worship” produced and published by Concordia University Wisconsin for the pattern used for these 7 Theses, including much of their content and wording.

8 The term, Royal Priesthood of the Baptized, is used in this document because it identifies

service; that service which always directs us back to the Triune God from whom all blessings flow. Therefore,

**WE REJECT** that worship is primarily a human activity, embodied in congregations where fabricated endeavors promote emotion-centered adoration and praise.

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN** for ACELC congregations? Recognizing the Trinitarian-centeredness of orthodox Christian worship, the ACELC congregations pledge themselves to liturgical orders, traditions, practices, and hymnody which locate Christ at the heart and center of God's gracious activity whereby He delivers and faith lays hold of, and receives, the grace of God and the merit of Christ in the promise of the Gospel.

### **Thesis 2**

**WE CONFESS** that orthodox Christian worship emanates from the grace-filled, life-giving Gospel of Jesus Christ; that He and His atoning sacrifice for all mankind's sin is the heart, the center, the fount of all Christian worship; and that in worship, this living and saving Lord comes to give us His own divine, eternal life in body and soul. Therefore,

**WE REJECT** worship practices which give the impression that worship derives from the Law, that is, that our works, feelings, or gifts supplement the work of Christ.

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN** for ACELC congregations? Recognizing the grace-filled, life-giving nature of orthodox Christian worship, the ACELC congregations pledge themselves to orders of service (liturgy) which are in service to the Gospel as well as preaching which includes God's Word of Law and Gospel, rightly divided, with the saving Gospel of forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ Jesus being most prominent.

### **Thesis 3**

**WE CONFESS** that in the liturgy, God's Holy Word and Sacraments are proclaimed and administered, and through these Means of Grace, God

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concretely whom the Lord of the Church is serving in the Divine Service. The ACELC uses this term in its "Evidence of Errors ... in the Office of the Holy Ministry" document (p. 4), as do the sainted Rev. Ken Korby and Rev. George Wollenburg in some of their papers.

delivers forgiveness, life, and salvation into our ears, consciences, and mouths. Therefore,

**WE REJECT** that the liturgy is a mere form to produce the desired responses in worshippers.

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN** for ACELC congregations? Recognizing the great liturgical gifts bequeathed to the Church through the centuries as reliable and effective rituals for delivering the living and life-giving Gospel, the ACELC congregations pledge themselves to historic liturgical orders which ensure the centrality of the forgiveness of sins and contribute to unity and uniformity, including the Divine Service of Word and Sacrament along with the historic prayer offices.

#### **Thesis 4**

**WE CONFESS** that music's purpose in the Church is to support and adorn the living and life-giving voice of the Gospel. Therefore,

**WE REJECT** that music is present for entertainment or solely artistic purposes or to satiate the personal penchant of pastors or people.

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN** for ACELC congregations? Recognizing the importance of music in the Church, the ACELC congregations pledge themselves to such instruments, hymns, chorales, and other related music which are in accord with Lutheran theology and best aid congregational singing and support and adorn the living and life-giving voice of the Gospel.

#### **Thesis 5**

**WE CONFESS** that worship, the decent and orderly gathering of the Royal Priesthood of the Baptized around Word and Sacrament "with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven," transcends time, space, culture, and social barriers, and is thus catholic (i.e., universal, Christian). Therefore,

**WE REJECT** that worship is free to be defined by the tastes, whims, preferences, or visions of an individual or group of worshippers.

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN** for ACELC congregations? Recognizing the importance of peace and tranquility in Christ's Church, the ACELC

congregations pledge themselves to the historic liturgical rites of Christendom which are in agreement with Lutheran theology and undergird the living and life-giving voice of the Gospel.<sup>9</sup>

### **Thesis 6**

**WE CONFESS** that a setting and environment is best suited for worship when it is theologically sound, aesthetically pleasing, orderly arranged, and spiritually edifying. Therefore,

**WE REJECT** that art, architecture, and arrangement are neutral factors in a setting for worship.

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN** for ACELC congregations? Recognizing the importance of the setting and environment of worship, the ACELC congregations pledge themselves to strive to build and maintain such decent and orderly settings and environments as conform to Lutheran theology and practice, especially in promoting the centrality of the Word and Sacraments and enhancing a sense of holy and reverent awe, through our use of furnishings, seating, paraments, vestments, banners, etc.

### **Thesis 7**

**WE CONFESS** that true worship is not a matter of orders or liturgies, but the exercise of faith (which believes in the Triune God and receives His blessings and consolation) struggling with unbelief and despair (concerning the promises of the Gospel);<sup>10</sup> and yet, love for Christ and His Body engenders a limiting of personal freedom and promotes seeking consensus in all matters of worship because unity and uniformity of orders and ceremonies in a given Synod, Diocese, Territory, et al, best give expression to continuity with the Church catholic, promote tranquility, and avoid offenses. At the same time,

**WE REJECT** that all matters of ceremonies and human ordinances must be in conformity for fellowship, so long as there is otherwise agreement in doctrine and all its articles, including the right use of the holy sacraments.<sup>11</sup>

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9 LCMS Constitution, Article VI Conditions of Membership: "4. Exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechisms in church and school." To do otherwise than this is to violate our "covenants of love" (Foreward to Synod's Constitution & Bylaws).

10 Triglotta, Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope, paragraph 44.

11 Triglotta, Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article X, Of Church Rites, paragraph 7.

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN** for ACELC congregations? Recognizing the importance of ceremonies which serve the Gospel in curbing fleshly distractions, and acknowledging that we live in constant tension between freedom and constraint in our use of the Divine Service — a sacred tradition of the Lord which we are to pass on to succeeding generations by His grace — the ACELC congregations pledge themselves to the Divine Service where the Word is rightly preached and the Sacraments rightly administered, wherein the Holy Spirit, through the external Word, delivers a reliable account of the heavenly council's verdict to our conscience.

## **Soli Deo Gloria**

### **Appendix**

The resources used to formulate and write the ACLEC 7 Theses on Worship include Holy Scripture, The Lutheran Confessions, [Evidence of Errors in The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod: III. The Divine Service and Liturgical Offices](#), and those noted here. The first six of these Worship Theses are modeled after and heavily influenced by the "[6 Theses on Worship](#)" as highlighted in footnote 7. Those used in Thesis 7 are a result of the presentations and papers from the 2013 ACELC Conference: "Christ for Us: The Divine Service" ([2013 Conference Papers](#)). Additional resources for matters of importance related to worship may be found at the [ACELC website](#).