

Why Do We Do That?

This is the ninth in a series of articles Lutheran customs and practices. Do you have an idea for a church practice you would like explained? Suggest it to Pastor Becker.

Another way to ask the question about Lutheran customs and practices is “Why don’t you do that?” There are several practices which may be common in other churches which are not practiced in our church, including practices related to worship leaders.

Women pastors

While, there is no distinction between men and women in their relationship to God in Christ, as St. Paul emphasizes in Galatians 3:28, “...there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” the Bible makes clear that there is indeed a difference in their roles and relationships toward each other in marriage and in the church. Paul writes, “Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather she is to remain quiet.” (1 Tim. 2:11-12). In giving the same teaching to the Corinthians, Paul asserts that this is not just his personal opinion but is the practice in all the churches of the saints and is a command of the Lord. (1 Cor. 14:33-37). When describing those qualified to be pastors, he refers specifically to husbands (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:6).

While these verses, taken out of context could be taken to mean that women cannot speak in worship at all or teach anyone at all, Biblical references to women prophesying (Luke 2:36, Acts 21:9), and teaching (Acts 18:26) demonstrate that this would be overly extreme. However, acceptance of the word of God means that we recognize that women are not to be the official spokesmen of the church, but that men are to fulfill their duties as spiritual leaders in the home and church.

Although some Lutherans take these same verses to mean that women should not vote in church meetings, we also see this limitation on women voting *with* men as going beyond the instruction that women not exercise authority *over* a man. Applying the spirit of the rule, however, we also do not have women serving in the role of elder or congregation president unless those positions are specifically defined as not participating in exercising spiritual authority with the pastor. (For a more detailed explanation of this issue, see the tract “What about the ordination of women to the pastoral office”, found in the tract rack by the sanctuary doors.)

Lay Readers

Some churches commonly have members beside the pastor read the scripture lessons for worship. We do not, following the advice of our Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations that this is “properly the function of the pastoral office”. (Women in the Church, page 45, Sept. 1958) Paul writes to Timothy that the *public* reading of Scripture, that

is, as a part of public worship, is one of the pastoral duties given him in his ordination: “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect the gift, which was given to you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.” (1 Tim. 4:13-14)

Reading the scriptures in worship, when well done, is a type of “interpretive reading” and is a part of a pastor’s interpreting the Bible for his congregation.

Music Leaders

In some churches, the term “worship leader” may refer not to a pastor or preacher but to musicians. An understanding of worship leading or of worship itself, different from a Lutheran understanding, may be behind the practice in some churches of having the choir at the front, behind the pastor, or a band in a front and center position. In our church the musicians, choir, etc., are usually at the back. Beside practical and acoustical reasons for this placement is also our understanding of worship. Worship is not a performance the congregation watches, but an activity in which they together respond to God’s word. The music leaders lead and join in that response, so they are appropriately positioned so they also can face the altar and cross, which focus our worship on God himself.

There are occasions when, for practical, acoustical or visual reasons, the musicians may be at the front, such as a children’s Christmas service.