

CTCR Response to 2007 Res. 3-05 regarding “Serial Prayer”

The Synod at its 2007 convention adopted Res. 3-05 “To Provide Further Discussion and Guidance on the Matter of Serial Prayer.” This resolution reads as follows:

WHEREAS, In 2004 Res. 3-06A, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod commended for study *Guidelines for Participation in Civic Events*, a report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), “to help pastors, teachers, and church workers make decisions about participation in civic events” (2004 *Proceedings*, p. 131); and

WHEREAS, Congregations of the Synod have requested further clarification regarding serial prayer; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention assign to the CTCR the task of providing further guidance for participation in civic events that includes the offering of serial prayer.

At its Dec. 11-13, 2008 meeting, the CTCR adopted the following response to this request by the Synod:

The Commission has carefully re-examined the discussion of “‘serial’ or ‘seriatim’ prayers” on pages 19-20 of its report *Guidelines for Participation in Civic Events* (April 2004).^{*} Although some “further clarification” (cf. 2007 Res. 3-05) may be possible in terms of applying the “conditions” discussed in this section of the report to various events and situations that have arisen in the past, it is impossible to provide specific guidance for any and all events that may arise in the future. We simply cannot anticipate the precise nature, purpose, or context of every occasion that may arise in the future or set forth specific parameters surrounding participation in these types of events beyond what is already stated in the 2004 report. Ultimately, this is a matter that requires the exercise of pastoral judgment at a particular time and place. When presented with such a situation, a pastor is, of course, urged to consult with other pastors and advisors for counsel with regard to how to respond to such requests within his particular context.

Adopted Unanimously by the CTCR
Dec. 13, 2008

^{*}The text of the CTCR’s discussion of serial prayer on pages 19-20 of its 2004 report reads as follows:

The members of the Commission disagree about the issue of so-called “serial” or “seriatim” prayers involving representatives of different religious (Christian and/or non-Christian) groups or churches. Some members of the Commission believe that under no circumstances is it permissible for LCMS pastors to participate in any type of an event in which various Christian and/or non-Christian leaders “take turns” offering prayers, holding that such an activity by its very nature constitutes “joint prayer and worship.” The majority of the Commission believes that in some instances it may be possible and permissible for LCMS pastors to

participate in such an event as long as certain conditions are met (e.g., when the purpose of the event in question is clearly and predominately civic in nature, and when it is conducted in such a way that does not correspond to the LCMS understanding of a “service”; when no restrictions are placed on the content of the Christian witness that may be given by the LCMS pastor; when a sincere effort is made by those involved to make it clear that those participating do not all share the same religious views concerning such issues as the nature of God, the way of salvation, and the nature of religious truth itself).

It should be noted in this connection that all members of the Commission agree that, understood from a Christian perspective, prayer is always in some sense “an expression of worship.” The question is whether it is possible under any circumstances for an LCMS pastor to offer a prayer in a public setting involving a variety of religious leaders without engaging in “joint prayer and worship.” Some believe that this is not possible. The majority believes that it may be possible depending on such factors as how the event is arranged and understood and how the situation is handled by the pastor in question, in order to make it clear that “joint prayer and worship” is not being conducted or condoned.