



Evangelical Lutheran Worship: **Shaping Daily Prayer for a Variety of Settings**

In scripture, we are encouraged to “pray without ceasing.” The whole Christian life is enveloped in prayer, both as individuals and with others. When joining with a community of people to pray, whether in a formal worship setting, at a retreat, before a meeting or rehearsal, or in a hospital room, our heritage has provided a treasure chest of resources from which we can draw to shape our communal prayer.

The services of Daily Prayer in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (pp. 295-331) represent one manifestation of ecumenically-received patterns. Just as Christian traditions of daily prayer have varied greatly around the world and throughout time, so are these services in *ELW* flexible and can be adapted for many circumstances. If planning a large festive worship event, the *ELW* services could be enhanced with a lot of singing and ceremony. If preparing for a simple time of prayer, perhaps at a rehearsal, meeting, or class, they can be pared down to their basic form.

The basic pattern is simple:

Psalm
Scripture
Prayer

Don’t overlook silence. Reflecting on God’s word in silence is a powerful form of prayer itself. No matter the setting, allow plenty of time for silence, allowing worshipers to listen to God. It’s not entirely about us talking to God.

In *ELW*, the basic pattern is enriched with some kind of opening appropriate to the time of day, season, or occasion, additional psalms and songs, a time of reflection on the readings, various dialogues and responses, a Gospel Canticle, and a blessing. Any of these elements may be included or omitted as appropriate for the particular event.

Starting from simplest to more complex, here are some examples of possible orders:

Psalm
Scripture
Prayer

Psalm
Scripture
Reflection
Canticle
Prayer

Psalm
Hymn/Song
Scripture
Reflection
Canticle
Prayer

Opening
Psalms
Hymn/Song
Scripture
Reflection
Canticle
Prayer
Blessing

And everything in between!

One form of prayer is included in each of the *ELW* services, but the directions say “or another form of the prayers may be used,” opening the possibilities wide open. Free prayer, chanted litanies, silence, a series of historic collects, or some combination may be incorporated. Prayer forms can be interchanged between services. For example, a litany (as in Evening Prayer) could be sung in Morning Prayer. The form within Morning Prayer (page 304) can be used by itself or in other services. Consider creating prayers unique for your community. The form on page 304 can be useful:

Opening sentence.

A series of thanksgivings with time for silence or adding their own petitions.

A series of petitions with time for silence or adding their own petitions.

A concluding prayer.

Responsive Prayer (pages 328-331) could be used in its entirety within one of the other services or just the portion on page 329 (commonly know as “Suffrages”) could be included, perhaps with the prayers that follow.

Responsive Prayer (with its options for various times of day and occasions) works well in some settings by itself. Adding a hymn/song or psalm and a reading from scripture before Responsive Prayer are simple ways to enhance its use.

At first glance, some of the services as they appear in *ELW* may seem a bit overwhelming since much of the text is set to music to be sung by a leader and the assembly. When planning, remember that anything set to music may be spoken (or the other way around).

It is also important to pay attention to the flexible rubrics, such as “may,” “other appropriate psalm,” “additional assembly song,” or “one or more scripture readings.” Exploring the options that are already present in the *ELW* material may open creative possibilities for you while staying connecting to the heart of the Church’s worship patterns.

If planning a service that will be sung, be aware of the diverse possibilities that are within the Service Music in the Assembly Song section of *ELW*: #224-236. Other resources offer a wealth of diverse music.

Of particular interest is a rubric in the services of Morning and Evening prayer following the reading of Scripture.

The reading of scripture is followed by silence for reflection. Other forms of reflection may also follow, such as brief commentary, teaching, or personal witness; non-biblical readings; interpretation through music or other art forms; or guided conversation among those present.

Imagine the possibilities! These suggestions could include everything from a conversation around a camp fire while on retreat to a Bach cantata; an artist creating visual interpretations while a drama unfolds reflecting on the readings; a homily or readings from the fathers and mothers of the Church from all times. This is just scratching the surface of possibilities.