



Guidelines for the holding of Sunday Services by Leagues and other Organisations on a Congregational Level

1. Introduction:

Leagues on a congregational level have featured on the Parish Preaching Plan for quite a few years already. In the past year others have joined in (Imbokodo, YAL, Sunday School) to more fully represent the different organisations active in our church. These guidelines seek to clarify the aim, necessary preparations and the manner of holding Sunday services by Leagues and Organisations in order to fully reap the benefits of their involvement.

2. Who?

All Leagues and Organisations recognised by ELCSA should be given a chance to take responsibility of planning and holding a Sunday Service at least once per preaching plan period (4-5 months). Furthermore, other organisations or groups, which might be of a more informal nature, may – after consultation with the parish pastor – be accorded a chance as well.

It should be clarified, that no individual (member or non-member of ELCSA) is allowed to preach in a Sunday church service without prior consultation with the parish pastor, who bears the final responsibility of spiritual activities of the congregations/parish.

3. Why?

As we move towards 500 years Lutheran Reformation (2017), it is helpful to recommit ourselves to one of the foundations of Lutheran Teachings – the „priesthood of all believers“. This teaching does not mean, that the ordination of pastors is no longer necessary, but rather stresses the ability and responsibility of all church members to spread the gospel in word and deed, and not to completely delegate this „lifeblood of the church’s mission“ to the clergy, i.e. ordained pastors.

One way of making the priesthood of all believers a reality is by encouraging church members to organise a Sunday service. This will be an encouragement to the members themselves, to reflect on their faith, the word of God and how to pass on the Good News in a relevant way. Furthermore, through this practice, congregations can identify new talent amongst its members regarding proposals for lay preachers.

4. How?

A good preparation of a service is vital – not only for the proper conducting of the service, but also for the upliftment of those responsible. The following points should be considered:

- A Sunday service is not a one-man/woman-show. As many members of the responsible League/Organisation as possible should be involved (sermon, readings, prayers, liturgy, music, decoration of the altar, possibly technical assistance, etc.). This is also a chance for a league-based choir to be involved in the Sunday service.

- The sermon preparation should start as a bible study or sharing of thoughts on the sermon text by the whole league/organisation responsible. Just delegating one member to „write a sermon“ is not the aim!
- The sermon may be held by just one person (after a sharing of thoughts with other members), but other methods should also be considered:
 - o A sermon in the form of a dialogue by two people
 - o A sketch/short play, which communicates the main message of the text
 - o Projection of a suitable picture or playing a short music piece which leads the congregation towards the deeper meaning of the sermon text
- The hymns, music pieces, prayers, liturgy should correspond in their content with the topic of a Sunday and with the prescribed readings. It is always helpful to state the topic of the Sunday in the beginning and to align other activities to this one topic.
- Proper dedication in the planning of the service is vital. Those responsible for readings or for leading the liturgy should rehearse their activities sufficiently to ensure a respectful (but not boring!) service.
- Before the service commences, the league/organisation responsible will gather at least 15 minutes before the actual sunday service time, to ask God’s guidance and blessing while conducting the service. Barring exceptional circumstances, coming late to a service for which one is responsible, shows a lack of respect and dedication.

5. ...and then?

A proper evaluation of the service is of great value for those responsible. A short feedback may be requested from congregational members. A chance should be given to everybody involved to state their perceptions of how the service went. Constructive criticism is an important step on the path of improvements – nobody is perfect!! A prayer after the service of the group responsible is a good chance to thank our God for the opportunity to work in His vineyard!