

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

VOLUME 1

G. INTER-DENOMINATIONAL COOPERATION – CHURCH MOVEMENTS

Women's World Day of Prayer

*Adopted by the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations, August 1968.
Re-affirmed by the General Synod, 1978 Convention.*

Not edited.

The Lutheran Church of Australia recognises that the movement which has culminated in the annual observance of the Women's World Day of Prayer has sprung from noble purposes and sincere motives. Nevertheless, as this Day is an expression of joint prayer and worship, the attitude which the Church adopts to participation in it must be guided by the careful consideration of other aspects besides those of purposes and motive, especially the aspect of its theological significance.

The guidance given to the women of the Church by the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations is as follows:

1. That they do not participate in the Women's World Day of Prayer on a denominational basis;
2. That, mindful of the privilege of prayer and the divine promises which are connected with acceptable prayer, they actively cultivate the spirit and practice of true prayer in their homes, fellowship groups, guilds, rallies, conventions, and in the times of worship of their congregations;
3. That if, in addition to the above opportunities for prayer, they are convinced that it is necessary to have a time of prayer that has some link with the praying of other women, they conduct a Lutheran Women's Day of Prayer under the guidance of their own Church.

The reasons for this guidance are based on the following:

THE NATURE OF AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRAYER

1. The unity, power, and efficacy of prayer does not depend on personal unitedness; nor does it necessarily follow that the greater the mass of those who pray, the greater is the unity and power of their prayer. The promise is given to us: 'If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven'

(Matt 18:19 RSV). The realisation that there are large groups praying can certainly be an uplifting spiritual thought and experience, but the true unity and agreement in prayer is the vital point.

2. Whatever reasons may be given for an organised Women's Day of Prayer can be advanced with equal force in favour of other organised groupings, e.g. the men of the world, or according to occupation. But this type of approach to prayer has in it as many elements that destroy the concept of united prayer as elements that promote; for the best and strongest expression of united prayer is given when men, women, and children, united by a common faith and possibly even a similar liturgy, together approach the throne of grace in their worship, wherever they may be in the world, and pray for those things which all mankind needs.
3. Lutherans have in the Christian Year a world day of prayer, when the call to prayer goes forth in a particular way and links Christians in truly united prayer. This is the Fifth Sunday after Easter, the Sunday Rogate. The Women's World Day of Prayer cannot therefore be regarded as vital for the life of the Church nor for the cultivation of prayer.

Note: for the second and third reasons given here, while permitting the possibility of a Lutheran Women's Day of Prayer, this possibility is not promoted.

THE AIMS AND PRACTICES CONNECTED WITH THE WOMEN'S WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

4. In many Australian States the Women's World Day of Prayer is now under the auspices of the respective Women's Inter-Church Councils. The aims of these Councils are (as expressed in the words of the Victorian Council and the Queensland Constitution):
 - a. to promote friendship and cooperation between women of all branches of the Christian Church. (Victoria: Queensland almost identical).
 - b. To promote the unity of the Christian Church through fellowship in Christ. (Victoria)
 - c. To provide an avenue whereby they may unitedly serve the kingdom of God, particularly with regard to Social Reform, and Right International Relationship (Queensland)
or
 - d. To provide an avenue whereby Christian women, as used of God, may unitedly strive to establish His kingdom on earth by the application of the teaching of Christ to Community, National and International Relationships (Victoria).

These aims express an approach to the question of establishing unity in the Christian Church with which our Church does not find itself in agreement.

5. Reports published by the organisers indicate that in Australia and other parts of the world the activities connected with this movement are not limited to this one Day of Prayer. Periodical prayer meetings and smaller prayer groups have been organised, and in various areas interdenominational companion Days have been instituted. There is a strong school of thought in international activity which proposes that as much combined inter-Church activity as possible should be arranged among the laity (men, women, and youth) at the local level, so that the attitude of the Churches as such regarding the basis on which unity can be established, is finally burst open by the pressures that come from within. Consciously in some cases, and unconsciously in others, the Women's World Day of Prayer is becoming one of these pressure points.

6. Some aspects of programs and prayers which have been prepared for universal use on the Women's World Day of Prayer have either been clearly capable of misunderstanding or have directly contravened teachings of our Church. Participation in such unexpurgated programs is not possible.

THE THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS AS STATED IN THE THESES OF AGREEMENT

7. The Theses on Joint Prayer and Worship acknowledge that 'joint prayer cannot under all circumstances be identified with unionistic prayer of church fellowship' (Theses 11.1). Individual interpretations of the circumstances and reasons which would permit participation in joint prayer in the Women's World Day of Prayer may not be unanimous in our Church; but the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations is of the opinion that the permissible circumstances referred to in the paragraphs 3,4,5,6 and 7 are not applicable to the purposes and practice of the Women's World Day of Prayer.
8. The Theses on Joint Prayer and Worship indicate the circumstances when joint prayer 'it be condemned and avoided'. These are 'when joint prayer shows the marks or characteristics of unionism'. 'Such marks and characteristics of unionism are:
 - a. failure to confess the whole truth of the Divine Word (*in statu confessionis*);
 - b. failure to reject and denounce every opposing error;
 - c. assigning error equal right with the truth;
 - d. creating the impression of unity in faith or of church fellowship, where it does not exist' (Theses 11.2).

While it may not have been the intention of the original promoters, and while it is not everywhere stated with equal pointedness in the aims of the present organising bodies, we believe that the Women's World Day of Prayer has been channelled into that stream of inter-Church activity which creates 'the impression of unity in faith or of church fellowship, where it does not exist'. Though Christians should everywhere give expression to their oneness in Christ, this can only be done where such oneness is in fact based on oneness of faith and confession.

World Day of Prayer

Prepared by the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations. Adopted by the General Synod at its 1987 Convention.

Not edited.

Whereas the 1978 LCA Statement on 'Women's World Day of Prayer' was prepared and adopted as a 'guidance to the women of the Church'; and Whereas after study and careful consideration by the church's Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations it was found that, because of the changes in the stated 'Aims and Practices Connected with the Women's World Day of Prayer', the most serious objections raised in the 1978 Synodical Statement against the participation of Lutheran women in this annual event were no longer applicable:

Be it resolved

1. That the 1978 Statement on 'Women's World Day of Prayer' be seen in its historical context as pastoral advice to alert all women of the church to the need of making an informed decision in regard to their participation in this ecumenical event;
2. That the 1978 Statement on 'Women's World Day of Prayer' be no longer regarded as a rule for the women of the church to avoid under all circumstances any form of participation in the 'Women's World Day of Prayer';
3. That the 1978 Statement on 'Women's World Day of Prayer' be read by all members of the church as a reminder of their confessional commitment to make an informed decision in regard to participation in events of an ecumenical nature, including joint prayer and worship, in the light of the principles stated in the *Theses of Agreement*, II, 'Joint Prayer and Worship' [cf A4 & A5 in Book of Statements].