The following statement has been received as pastoral guidance by consensus of the Society's 2008 General Chapter and is offered to members of the Society of the Holy Trinity for study, discussion, and application.

The Society of the Holy Trinity

Pastoral Guidance Concerning the Language of Worship

October 2008

New worship resources have been and will continue to be approved and published by Lutheran denominations. The advent of new worship books provides an opportunity to renew our understandings of worship as we make decisions about the worship resources that will be used in our congregations. The following theses are offered as a way of reviewing our understanding of worship and evaluating the materials in our worship books.

1. The God of the Bible desires worshipers (Exodus 3:12; John 4:23).

2. Worship reinforces the reality of God both publicly and personally.

3. Worship is an expression of devotion to God offered both corporately by the community of faith and domestically in households.

4. God gives His people his Name so that they may call upon him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving (Small Catechism, Part 1, Second Commandment). Yahweh (YHWH), usually translated as "Lord," is the covenant name of God. It occurs 6823 times in the Old Testament and is by far the most frequent usage. Jesus taught his disciples to call God Abba (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2), which is a familiar form of "father."

5. The Name of God is to be protected from profanation, as we see in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11), and is to be sanctified by proper use, as we see in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2).

6. The Name of God is to be distinguished from the word "God" (*El*, *Elohim*, *Theos*), attributes of God (e.g. "Most High," "Mighty One, "Holy One"), and the workings of God (e.g. "Creator," "Redeemer," "Sanctifier"), although the attributes and workings of God may be recalled in prayer.

7. Jesus speaks to the Father in the second person. He refers to the Father and the Holy Spirit in the third person. The language of worship includes words about God in both prayer and proclamation.

8. Because Christ is true God as well as true man, he is worthy of worship. Jesus accepts the worship (*proskunesis*) of men and women (Matthew 2:2, 8, 11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:13; 15:35; 20:20; 28:9; Mark 1:40; 5:6, 22; 10:17; 15:19 (ironically); Luke 5:12; 8:41; 17:16; 24:52; John 9:38; 11:32; 18:6).

9. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus in His baptism like a dove and a voice from heaven says "This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11). Thus, the scene at Jesus's baptism shows the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Christian worship is Trinitarian, addressed to a God who is a community of persons (see 2 Corinthians 13:13) by a community of faith in this God. Such worship is orthodox in the true sense of the word: *orthodoxia* means "right praise."

10. Jesus commissions His disciples to baptize all nations (peoples) "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Christian baptism is not performed in any other name.

11. Invocations of Name of God on the Christian assembly are also "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

12. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all referred to as God. Each is described as deserving of worship, something of which only God Himself is worthy.

13. The Holy Trinity is the object of Christian worship. Christ, "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," is the content of Christian worship. This theology of worship is expressed *par excellence* in such creedal canticles as *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, *Te Deum laudamus*, and *Quicunque vult*.

14. Jesus is the heavenly high priest who intercedes for His brothers and sisters as the mediator (1 Timothy 2) on the basis of his sacrifice of obedience to the Father (Hebrews 10:9) so that we are able to draw near to God through Christ (Hebrews 7:25; 10:19-22; 13:15). Christian prayer and worship, both public and private, is offered through Jesus Christ our Lord because He is our mediator and advocate with God the Father (Ephesians 2:18; Romans 1:8; 16:27; 2 Corinthians 1:20; 1 Peter 2:5; 4:11).

15. Christian prayer and worship is enabled by the Holy Spirit, who helps us in our weakness (Romans 8:15f., 26f.).

16. It is appropriate to address in prayer the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit either together or individually.

17. The fullest and most complete way of addressing God in prayer is to the Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *in* the unity of the Holy Spirit.

18. The Great Thanksgiving of the Holy Communion, Lord's Supper, or Mass, which begins with the preface and ends with a concluding doxology, is always addressed to God the Father, in praise of His work of creation and the redemption of His people (e.g. the Preface leading to the *Sanctus*), in remembrance of the work of the Son (centered in the words of institution), and in supplication of the Holy Spirit (including an invocation of the Holy Spirit for the gift of communion).

19. Instances where "God" is used to circumvent the Name "Father" can create theological confusion since "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are not three Gods but one God" (The Athanasian Creed).

20. It is not appropriate to address prayer simply to "the Holy Trinity" or to invoke "the Holy Trinity" as a category because this is a theological construct, not the Name of God.

21. Orders of Christian worship, called liturgy (a public service), are not found in the Bible, but the words of the Bible provide the most appropriate words of Christian liturgy.

22. These biblical words may be translated in a way that makes them more suitable for reciting than for study (especially the texts of the psalms and canticles), but the sense of the text (whether it is prayer or proclamation) cannot be altered. For example, a psalm verse that is addressed to the assembly as a word of proclamation should not be rewritten as a prayer addressed to God.

23. Versifications of biblical texts that foster congregational singing (e.g. metrical psalms and canticles) have an honored place in Christian worship. It should be clear that these lyrics are not literal translations.

24. Traditionally, biblical psalms and canticles used in Christian worship terminate with the *Gloria Patri*. The classical hymns and hymn versifications of psalms and canticles end with a Trinitarian doxology.

25. Cultural sensitivity may commend the use of gender inclusive language when referring to the human community. It is not desireable to avoid the use of the masculine personal pronoun when referring to the Lord God of Israel/the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

At the present time the Society of the Holy Trinity will prefer to use in its retreats and gatherings *Lutheran Book of Worship* and ancillary books based on its provisions such as *For All the Saints* and *The Daily Prayer of the Church*. Some of the same or similar orders and texts in LBW are also found in *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979) and *Lutheran Service Book* (2007). Other resources should be evaluated according to the foregoing principles.

Received by the General Chapter of the Society of the Holy Trinity, October 2008

Society of the Holy Trinity
contact: webmaster@societyholytrinity.org

Copyright © 2008 Society of the Holy Trinity. All rights reserved.
Posted -- 6 November 2008