

## **WISCONSIN FEDERATION OF LUTHERAN ALTAR GUILDS**

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**NEWSLETTER – Spring 2018**

Dear Friends,

Allow me to introduce myself to you, and to express my thanks for all you do for the services of the Lord's house. I have been a pastor for 27 years and have been a part of congregations in Missouri, Kansas, Illinois, California, North Dakota, Nebraska and now Wisconsin. Along the way there have been a kaleidoscope of practices, customs, tastes, budgets, and ideas about what makes a worship space both functional and beautiful. I have been blessed to use wooden, plastic, silver, aluminum and crystal vessels to distribute the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation that Christ gives to His faithful people in His very body and blood. I've seen banners made out of everything from burlap to velvet, from screen-printed images, to felt cut out by those who were just learning to use scissors. Altar linens I've used have been made out of everything from paper towel purificators (that would have been at a youth float trip worship service) to century-old hand-crocheted veils.

The one thing that has been constant is that wherever the Lord is worshiped, there are those whose love for the gifts of the altar transposes into acts of selfless giving and pursuit of beauty and reverence in all things related to worship. I hope to encourage that pursuit of beauty and reverence among you. You already have gathered together for the furthering of your skills and desires to learn more about your craft. As a Pastoral advisor, I hope to encourage you by reaffirming your faith in the promises of the gifts of worship, by continuing to deepen your understanding and knowledge of this worship-related, and to celebrate with joy the loving devotion you show in the performance of your duties for the House of the Lord. May God continue to bless our time together!!

Pastor Thomas Schmitt  
St. John's Lutheran Church, Glendale, WI

### ***ARTICLE***

#### **Incense.....Is It Lutheran?**

Before we delve into the question of whether use of incense is Lutheran, let us first explore what incense is, what history it has, how it is represented both in the Old Testament and New Testament and what meaning it can have in our worship today.

Incense is a wood or resin, which when burned gives off a sweet fragrance or aroma. It has both a sacramental and sacrificial symbolism in its use in religious rites and as an external in Christian Worship

Sacramentally, it symbolizes the mystery of God's coming to us, as in a cloud of glory like that which led the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 12:21) and filled the tabernacle with sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving (Exodus 40:34) and ultimately in the glory of our Lord's becoming flesh (John 1:4)

Sacrificially, incense is a symbol of prayer. "Let my prayer be accepted as sweet-smelling incense in your presence. Let the lifting up of my hands in prayer be accepted as an evening sacrifice" (Psalm 141:2) in (Rev. 8:3,4) "Another angel came with a gold incense burner and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer on the gold altar in front of the throne. He offered it with the prayers of all God's people. The smoke from the incense went up from the angel's hand to God along with the prayers of Gods' people."

One service in which incense may be used is the Festival of Epiphany. Next to Easter, Epiphany is the oldest in the Church. Its name that comes from the Greek word for "manifestation and its theme is light.

The service form for Epiphany is Evening Prayer. The congregation has lighted candles that illuminate the church. The hymn "Joyous Light of Glory" is sung while the Sanctuary lights are lit.

The Scripture readings for this festival.....

- Recall God's promises that people sitting in darkness would see a great light. (Isaiah 9:22, 60:(1-9)
- Jesus is the light of the world. (John 1:5, 8:12, 9:5)
- Frankincense, a uniquely sensuous substance, was a gift brought by the Magi to the Christ Child (Matthew 2:11)

The congregation sings the antiphon portion of the Psalmody – "Let my prayer rise before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice"- then the altar may be censured. The censuring of the altar concludes as the minister offers a prayer that recalls the meaning of incense as a biblical symbol for Christian prayer.

The Gospel is read, a commentary on an Epiphany text is given prior to the singing of the canticle which is the Magnificat. The Litany follows emphasizing the Word for the world.

The Altar Guild will need to have the vessels ready for this service:

- Thurible: A vessel with a perforated cover for burning incense. A piece of charcoal is ignited and placed in the thurible and over it grains of incense are sprinkled. The thurible is then swung to disperse the smoke.
- Thurifer: The server who carries the thurible.
- Incense Boat: A small bowl or dish, usually footed, which holds the incense ready to be put in the thurible.
- Incense Spoon: A spoon which is used to transfer the incense from the incense boat to the thurible.
- Incense and Charcoal – A variety of Incense fragrances and Charcoal can be purchased at T. H. Stemper Company at 1-800-686-3610 or [www.stempers.com](http://www.stempers.com)

One of the fears in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod retains is the fear of being too "Catholic", We may fear that we are not correct, even when we know we are. We did not leave the Catholic church, we reformed it. The use of incense to help us attain a reverent and awe-filled attitude in the presence of the Living God is a blessing. The use of incense in worship services is in the category of those things that God neither commands or forbids.

The roots of incense are Biblical.....therefore.....Lutheran!

Submitted by – Gail Siewert

Sources for this article:

Bible  
 Altar Guild Manual  
 Gathered Guests  
 Good Shepherd Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod – Rev. Jim Roemke  
 Rebecca At The Well  
 Wels-The use of incense in worship services  
 What Every Altar Guild Should Know

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**WFLAG MEMBERSHIP LIST – 2017**

Beautiful Savior	Milwaukee
Benediction	Milwaukee
Bethlehem	Sheboygan
Divine Savior	Hartford
Elm Grove	Elm Grove
Faith	Merrill
Immanuel	Westfield
Our Redeemer	Kingsford MI
Our Savior	Sheboygan
Peace	Neenah
St. John’s	Beloit
St. John’s	Glendale
St. John’s	Mayville
St. John’s	Portage
St. John’s	Sullivan
St. John’s	Wausau
St. Mark	Sheboygan
St. Paul	Grafton
St. Paul	Hillpoint
St. Paul	Sheboygan
St. Paul	Stevens Point
Trinity	Menasha
Trinity	Mequon
Trinity	Sheboygan
Trinity	Wausau

**THANK YOU!...OUR SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
**SHEBOYGAN, WISCONSIN**

*For hosting our Annual Meeting  
 on Saturday, April 22, 2017*

*Everyone enjoyed the joining together  
 for worship, fellowship, information,  
 and your warm hospitality.*

**“the Board”**

**PRAYER.....**

Thank You, Lord,

For this opportunity and privilege to prepare  
 your Altar for worship and the Holy Sacraments

which give continued growth in faith and  
 forgiveness of sins.

Let us, always, approach our tasks with humble,  
 willing and contrite hearts.

To your Glory, we serve you.

Amen