

Ongoing Ambassadors For Christ

We are a Recognized Service Organization of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod that helps equip youth and adults for evangelism witnessing.

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OAF C C R I E R

SPECIAL EDITION

Objections and Answers



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O AFC Objections and Answers

By Pastor Matthew Tasse

In my years with O AFC, I've heard a number of objections and concerns that folks have raised against some of the things we do. Many of them come from the best of intentions to insure that people are led into a right understanding of God's Word and faith in Jesus Christ and must be answered with Scripture and clear thinking through of the issue. Some of them come about because of abuses or unintended uses of O AFC, and so are easily corrected by going back to the basics. Others, though, have nothing to do with theology but are entirely about practical matters that are free to be changed according to the best needs of a local group – but should be done only after considering why a previous practice existed and how change would impact the national and future witness of O AFC as an organization. Here I'd like to take the time to answer some of the objections I've heard so that we may be able to continue the conversation about how to keep O AFC as the best youth and evangelism program in our Synod for the next 40 years.

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Does the Bible Teach Lay People Should Evangelize?

So often, evangelism groups will use Matthew 28:18-20 as their basis for the call to lay evangelism and Lutherans have consistently reacted against this text for that use. Good Bible study has rightly pointed out that Jesus was specifically addressing his apostles with this Commission, and it therefore applies to the apostolic office, to Pastors – not to the laity. Sometimes, for this very reason, some Lutherans have therefore condemned all lay missions. Truthfully, if you can't show from Scripture where it says that lay people have the call to actually verbalize the Gospel, to teach and preach, then we shouldn't be encouraging youth to do it. And if it can be shown that the texts we're using to encourage evangelism are really texts about the Office of the Ministry, the Pastors' call to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, then we shouldn't use those texts to encourage lay evangelism.

However, Matthew 28:18-20 is not the only verse that compels the spread of the Gospel. Luther rooted the call to lay evangelism in 1 Peter 2:9-12 where he says, "This is part of being a priest, being God's messenger and having his command to proclaim his Word. You should preach the 'good work,' that is, the miraculous work that God has done as he brought you from darkness into light. This is the highest priestly office." And again Luther rightly says, "For no one can deny that every Christian possesses the word of God and is taught and anointed by God to be priest... But if it is true that they have God's word and are anointed by him, then it is their duty to confess, to teach, and to spread [his word]." This is furthered by examples of people like the woman at the well in John 4 and Philip and Stephen in Acts, and even by the physician Luke who was not an Apostle or a Pastor but who, like an investigative journalist, undertook to get the eyewitness accounts of the life of Christ so that he could share them with others through his Gospel and the book of Acts. And so Paul says in Ephesians 4:25, "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another."

This is not in competition to the Office of the Ministry held by the pastor to publically teach and preach and administer the Sacraments. Rather, Luther put it this way. The pastor stands in the public office, acting publically on behalf of the Church as the public face of the Church in the stead and by the command of Christ. The laity hold the private office, acting in their private lives on behalf of Christ. Where a situation calls for a public act, the pastor does it. Where a situation calls for a private act, the people do it. Thus it's not a tyranny of the Office, for the pastor doesn't hold the ministry captive, but the pastor has been ordained to act and do publically on behalf of the people so that they can do privately in service to Christ. So everyone is not a minister, in its common sense, but everyone does have the Gospel and the right and responsibility to share it.

That's why OAFB is committed to training youth and adults to be ready to share that message, even as Peter said, "In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

Do You HAVE to Do the Survey at an OAFI Weekend?

One of the witnessing methods of OAFI is the survey for a reason. Therefore, as part of the standard program, we train youth in doing it. Yet, there are many weekends when we don't get to do the survey because of weather, lack of training, or other issues. That doesn't mean that you didn't have an OAFI weekend if you didn't have canvassing, then. The important thing is training the youth to be prepared to invite people to their churches, respond to objections to the faith, and be confirmed in their own faith that Jesus Christ is the only way to eternal life. That's why canvassing is part of OAFI. It serves a two-fold purpose: that it reaches out with the Gospel and also that it trains people to reach out with the Gospel. So we can train youth in the witnessing methods and the reasons they exist without ever HAVING to do the survey in the neighborhoods. We *can* do that in an extreme case – where local neighborhoods don't allow it or you have a group who's not trained enough to do it, yet - but our GOAL should always be to put into practice what we're learning about witnessing and the survey actually does that at the weekends. The same thing goes for puppet shows, dramas, personal witnesses – really, everything about OAFI: it's not just the training that's important, but putting it into practice because then we reach others with the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen for us.

Is the Witnessing Survey a "Bait and Switch?"

Now, there are some objections people have had to the survey that we need to be able to answer. One, is the survey manipulation, a bait and switch? Some have said that we're lying to people because we say we're taking a survey and then we proselytize. This is not really true. We go out taking a survey for the congregations to help them see the need for witnessing in their community regarding church attendance and saving faith. WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT WE ARE SERVING THE LOCAL CONGREGATION IN THIS WAY. Where we get this wrong, we really get everything wrong because we are tempted to start believing that the survey is about me going out into the world to show God – we have a drama about that, don't we?

Yet the beauty of the survey is that it puts Christians in direct, honest interaction with the world around them. When we ask people about their faith, any good Christian who encounters someone who doesn't know Christ needs to know how to answer their questions and share the truth of Christ. That's why we train youth and adults in the witnessing methods for Canvassing. When you're at the door and honestly taking a survey and someone tells you they believe they're going to heaven because of their own good works, you don't want someone jarring their own conscience later on because they missed the opportunity to share with that person the only biblical way to heaven through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. So we do take a survey, and when we find someone who needs, we share the good news.

And, yes, that's very convenient – and that's the point. But here's the issue: if OAFI went out into a community where everyone we talked to knew that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven, we should be shouting Alleluias at the top of our lungs and rejoicing that there wasn't any reason to teach our youth and adults any witnessing methods. And we would joyfully submit that survey to the local congregation and

encourage them to keep on doing what they're doing in preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments. But that won't happen until Jesus comes back. So we know that when we go out into the neighborhoods that we will get the opportunity to share Christ and so, as Peter says in his epistle, we prepare our hearts and minds to share the reason for the hope that we have.

For those who don't know about heaven or have some variant views, "Where do you believe you will go when you die?" is truly one of the best questions to ask people to discover about their faith. Since church attendance is important but not what saves you, congregations should really want us to ask people this last question about their faith. Which is why we then want to ask the question of why to get to the root of their faith: both so that the local congregation knows about the salvation needs of their community and so that we can learn whether or not there stands before us someone who needs to know about Christ. At the same time, Peter tells us to be ready to share with gentleness and respect, so we don't force the people at the door to answer and we don't act in disrespectful or forceful ways. That's why we always then ask if they would mind us sharing. That's one of the major reasons it's not a manipulation or a lie. We make it plain that this isn't part of the survey, simply something that any good Christian would want to share with someone who doesn't know Christ.

Is Going to People's Houses Safe in Our Day and Age?

The answer to that question will of course depend on who you ask and where you are and how you go about doing it. Because of news media and the instant access world in which we live, we are confronted with the effects of sin every day all throughout the country. Because of the rejection of basic Christian values and morals in our culture, the world to which we are exposed grows increasingly more openly sinful and hurtful to those known and unknown and especially to the Christian message of Law and Gospel. And because of the increasing culture of privatization, fewer people will welcome someone into their home or have a conversation with a person on their doorstep. All this is to say that because there is sin in the world, communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ will always encounter resistance, especially as our culture moves further away from essential Christian values like hospitality, respect, and true *agape* love. And, we realize, as we work with youth, there are some situations into which we should not place them.

That's why we send people into neighborhoods approved by the local pastor who should know his community and be able to identify places where youth should and should not go. That's also why, when we speak about host homes, we seek congregation members approved by the pastor – who, again, should know his community, especially his parishioners, well enough to identify places where youth should and should not go. There are dangerous and unsafe places in our world today and even among the safer places there are individuals who would take advantage of a situation to sin. That's why when O AFC sends our youth and adults to houses, either to canvass or to be hosted for the weekend, we take care to be cautious.

This is why we NEVER send an individual youth out on his or her own to do the survey. We always send groups of 2 or 3, and we always strive to have one male and one female per team – and if we have to have a team of only one gender, for safety sake we typically have that be a team of all guys. And we always send teams out with at least one

experienced person so that he or she can better read the situation. We tell the teams, if you feel uncomfortable or unsafe in an area, don't go there. Use your discretion. The same is true of hosting, except we also make sure not to mix genders in hosting so that we don't send a young girl to a house with a teenage boy, for example, nor do we send a young girl to the house of a widower. We seek in everything to take the most care of our youth and adults.

A note should be said here about Christian hospitality. OAFC relies on the basic Christian virtue of hospitality as displayed in Abraham, Melchizadek, Solomon, Jesus, and James, to name a few. We are one body, the whole Christian Church on earth, through Baptism into Christ and so we care for each other. And the Christ who loved the lost lives within us to desire reconciliation and fellowship with unbelievers, too. However, because of the privatization of our culture and even of Christianity, fewer and fewer people are willing to open their homes even to *Christian* strangers much less sojourners, widows, and orphans. While it is the place of the pastor to remind his people about this basic Christian virtue, we in OAFC can recognize 1) Hospitality is the Christian thing to give and to receive, 2) Our culture and our churches have been affected by the privatization of society, often without even realizing it, 3) We in OAFC help to commend this Christian virtue to congregations by requesting to be hosted by their members, and 4) We should always remember to show our deep gratitude in Jesus for those who do open their homes to us to care for the body of Christ.

Do I Really Need to Learn and Use the Different Methods?

If all the world knew Jesus as their only savior from sin and their only reason for a blessed eternal life, then there'd be absolutely no need for anyone to learn any organized pattern for sharing their faith. However, that's not the world we live in. And what's more, there's a lot in the Bible and we need to learn an organized way to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others so that we can be prepared.

One of the most basic ways we do that is with the Creeds. These are some of the best witnessing methods for telling someone what you believe about God. And you probably already have these methods committed to memory. Yet the Creeds are methods for answering the question, "What do you believe about God?" There are other questions out there and to those questions we need to be ready with an answer. The question we encounter at the door is "Why will you be allowed into heaven?" John 3:16 gives us a simple answer to that question that is for every single person by faith in that promise. Though some people need more than a simple answer.

If someone believes that their own works earn them heaven, then reading the card will not accomplish because they will hear it as an addition to their good works, which is why we have the SSS method and that's why we need to use it instead of just the John 3:16 card. The SSS answers the needed question of "Can I get to heaven because of something I've done?" If someone tells us that they know Jesus but they don't know if he's enough for them or aren't sure if their faith is strong enough, then simply reading the John 3:16 card won't help them confirm their salvation in Christ and we'll have missed the opportunity put before us by God. That's why we have the Assurance of Heaven method, and that's why we need to use it. So it is necessary to finish these parts of the survey to be the best Christian witness we can. Then we always make sure that we

invite and encourage them to our local LCMS church because that's what a believer does.

A quick note on memorizing the methods: Think through the needs of the person at the door who's truly struggling with the truth of God's Word. Whether they know it or not, if they don't know Jesus as their Savior they are struggling against God and need the answer. So if we think that we can just slough something off the cuff and be a good witness, we're kidding ourselves. We need to think through what we're going to say before we say it so that we say the best possible thing and we need to know what God's Word says about those different issues so that we're using, not our sinful words, but His Word, and using it as best as we can. Now, the OAFW witnessing methods are some of the best, most thought through applications of God's Word out there. And unless you're a trained theologian, it'd be better for you to learn how to say things like those methods before you try to say your own thing.

Why Do Some People Object to the Question, "Where Do You Believe You Will Go When You Die?"

Yes, some pastors are wary about the where you go when you die question. I know some worry that turning the focus of the survey on heaven takes away from the focus on Jesus by turning faith into a rewards system, heaven as reward rather than heaven as reality and life in Jesus Christ. You see this all the time when someone says that heaven isn't actually in the Bible. The Christian often struggles for verses that talk about heaven and frequently untrained Christians have difficulties. (First of all, heaven as a word is all throughout the Bible because the word itself means that stuff above the ground, however far up you go. It typically refers to the place where God is and so really means being in the presence of God.) But we can easily get sidetracked on the topic of heaven when we are intending to talk about Jesus.

The funny thing is that we've come to a point in our culture where many people actually can talk about heaven without ever talking about Jesus, and that's not right. So some pastors worry about that part of the survey because of the fear of proclaiming heaven apart from Christ. This is where our witnessing methods shine as Lutheran gems because they ingrain faith in Jesus Christ as the priority and the goal. And this question about where you go when you die is one of the best questions for having a real, not just surface, faith conversation because it really gets to the heart of the matter: eternal life. The promise of John 3:16, you'll note, is eternal life – not heaven! And the SSS method properly shows that sin and imperfection is the problem that separates us from eternal life in the presence of God (frequently called heaven), and even the Assurance of Heaven method roots the Gospel message in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins so that we could have eternal life in the presence of God (the assurance of heaven through Jesus Christ). So we speak about heaven because that's the language people know, but we're trained to turn their eyes to the certainty of faith in Jesus Christ. That's how we overcome the objection of heaven as reward and focus apart from Jesus.

Another reason pastors might use to be wary of the question is that it is the major question behind the Kennedy method of evangelism, which is a major non-Lutheran

evangelism program that emphasizes personal decisions and sinner's prayers and private conversions apart from the church or Baptism. Because that question is the keystone of that program, many pastors can think that we're using a non-Lutheran evangelism program.

Nothing is farther from the truth. It's just such a profound question that provides the opportunity for good Lutheran doctrine to be proclaimed, that we had to use it. Yet it's so profound a question that it *can* set someone up to receive false doctrine, as well, and so it has with the decision theology of the Kennedy method. Long way of saying, it may look the same on the outside but it is completely different. A good illustration then for talking about these concerns is the difference between Lutheran worship and Catholic worship; looks pretty similar on the outside but the details and reasons are completely different when you look at it.

A deeper reason some have given is the truth that Scripture is actually pretty vague regarding what happens to the soul between its separation from the body in death and the reunion of soul and body in the resurrection. You see, heaven, as the Bible teaches, is actually what we experience after the resurrection and new creation, after judgment day and the evil face the second death which the Bible calls hell. There, after the resurrection, we will be with God; there we will never again experience death or suffering, and there all will be happy. By asking where do you believe you will go when you die, if you want to be picky as some pastors are, we are clouding the issue and making it as if heaven were about only the spiritual bliss without the resurrection. This is a valid thing to be concerned about. But it's not a reality we can change at a stranger's door. And what's more, the question is really time sensitive because the resurrection does take place after you die, to be technical, it's just a matter of how long after you die. So the concern is valid, but the worry is nit-picky and much more something that pastors have to address in their own congregations to move people's understanding of terms like, after you die, to focus on the resurrection rather than a purely spiritual heaven. That's the pastors' job, not ours. So if he has a problem with it, in the most delicate way possible, he needs to teach his people to correctly interpret what happens after death rather than worrying about how we may be misconstrued.

If you have just a totally antagonistic person against the question, you might try seeing if they're comfortable with asking it in a different way, such as, "where do you believe you will spend eternity?" Or "what do you believe will happen to your eternal soul when you die?"

As said earlier, though, all of this is predicated upon the fact that we are collecting information for the local congregation so that they know the spiritual battle lines outside their front door. Since the most important thing is knowing Christ and him crucified, a local congregation should want to know about someone's faith more than someone's denomination. So we must ask some type of question for the survey to determine their spiritual worldview, and that involves more than just what pew they sit in. If the congregation can come up with a fitting question to discover this reality, you may make an exception for that congregation and inform your youth and adults to use that exceptional question, while explaining that it is different than the standard and yet, at the same time, showing how it relates precisely to that standard. Then you'll have to show the transition opportunities for sharing Christ if the person responds with

anything than other than Jesus, so that they can see how to use the methods - because the methods are tied to that question.

Hopefully that shows why some pastors may object to the question, where do you believe you will go when you die, while also showing how we can faithfully respond in Gospel freedom with upholding and encouraging the basics of O AFC.

Do the Guys Have to Lead Bible Study?

O AFC activities should always have Bible Studies. Though one of the main objections to the O AFC Bible Study format in our culture today is our insistence that the guys should lead the study. This is not because guys are naturally more capable at leading, nor is it because men are biologically more wired to comprehend what the text says – in fact, women, as an average, actually have a higher ability for reading comprehension than guys (which would explain the instructions things, right). It has nothing to do with ability. Rather, it has everything to do with the order that was instituted by God for his Church and our pursuit to live that out in our lives.

That order begins with Christ and his Church. Paul calls Christ the husband of his bride, the Church in Ephesians 5. And then he says that this eternally-intended relationship is the reality behind the image of a man and woman in marriage. That is to say, marriage is intended to look like Christ and his Church – not the other way around. And so when God tells us about marriage, he's also telling us about the relationship between Christ and the Church. And God says that Adam is the head of his family and therefore responsible for his family. That's why Paul also addresses congregations in 1 Timothy 2:7-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-40 telling them that women should not have spiritual authority over men in the Church of God in Christ. (It's not because of ability or culture or chauvinism; Paul says it's because Adam was created first and was, if you look at the text of Genesis 2, the first preacher of the Law and the Gospel in the first congregation of two.) For this reason, biblical churches don't ordain women, but, in faithfulness to God's Word, insist that men be pastors because this is what God's Word prescribes – again, not because of ability, training, learning, or culture, but because of the order of creation, and that doesn't change and won't ever change.

Because that's the order of the Church and the Family, O AFC wants to imitate and demonstrate that order in our Small Group Bible Studies as best we can so that youth who are surrounded with the exact opposite message from our culture can see us upholding God's Word in our lives and so embolden them to live faithfully in God's Word in their lives. So we train up our young men in the Scriptures and in how to study so that they can be prepared to lead others in that study.

But what does that mean for the gals at our weekends? Do they have to not ask any questions and remain silent the whole time? No. Good study of Paul's instructions tells us that Paul is specifically talking about leading and preaching, not of any sound at all. And, furthermore, the Small Group Bible Study is not the same thing as Church. Note this well, because it means that where there's no guys in the group (rare, but it happens sometimes when the Local Director is away), it's still okay for the girls to have a Bible Study led by another girl – because there isn't a guy around. But when there is a guy present to lead, the role of women in the Bible Study is the same as in marriage and

in the Church: to complement (not, say nice things, but complete and fit together) the Bible Study by filling in any gaps or weak points the leader might have. She can ask questions or provide insights, that's fine, simply always in respect to the leader.

Because the world around us refuses to hear God's plan for men and women, and because they continue to proclaim a completely opposite message of God to our youth, especially, in bold and loud ways, it's even more important that we as OAFB attempt to shine the light of God's truth for our youth and adults; to humble ourselves under God's Word so that he may lift us up by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Do We Really Need to Pray Twice at the Beginning?

I've noticed a number of guys leading the OAFB Small Group Bible Study without following the basic format. So it's probably good here to talk about the reason we have that format the way it is. First of all, two very different prayers for two very different purposes begin our Bible Study.

The first prayer is the prayer prayed by the leader to ask God to direct us in our time of study by showing us Christ. Remember, we talk about Bible Study as a witnessing method for pointing people to Christ. This is the true focus of every single Bible Study, both in OAFB and in the Church at large because Christ is the center and meaning of all Scripture (John 5:39). So we pray that God will guide us to do that very thing. The second is the group prayer of thanksgiving to orient our hearts in gratitude and to help youth and adults feel more comfortable praying in public. These are different prayers for different purposes and so, just like in Church where we pray many prayers because they're for many purposes, we should really pray both.

And the reason the format instructs you to do the somewhat awkward thing of praying the opening prayer first, pausing, and then leading the group thanksgiving prayer is so that others will be more comfortable praying the prayers after you. If you tell new people that all they have to do is pray a "thank you" prayer and you, the leader, go and do something else, what does that say to the person nervous about praying out loud? So instead, pray for God's Holy Spirit and guidance through his Word to show you Jesus Christ and him crucified for you in your Bible Study. Say Amen. And then lead the group in the one sentence thank you prayers with your *One Sentence* thank you prayer as the first example to model to them all that's asked of them. That means that the leader's one sentence prayer should probably be pretty short and unimimidating regardless of how much he has to be thankful for in order to calm the minds of those who may be nervous about praying – because people are pretty nervous about being asked to pray aloud, even in church, and we need to be sensitive to that.

Hopefully in your local groups you can ask your Pastoral Advisor to help train your guys in ways to lead the Bible Study, itself. That's one of the reasons local groups have Pastoral Advisors. There are multiple ways to do this. Probably the best way for youth to learn how to get into the Bible is by seeing other adult males, like their Director or their Pastor, doing that very thing in their Bible Study. For this reason, we shouldn't be afraid to have our leaders lead and our youth learn, even during Bible Studies – and not just the Renewal of Baptism study. And then, we learn from the discipleship model, after having seen many times how the leader leads, then the leader mentors a couple of

the youth by being present still while giving them the opportunity to try leading. The leader fills in the gaps and helps prompt the youth in better ways to use their own talents for leadership. Only after doing this a number of times, until the youth feels confident to be on their own and the leader feels confident he can do it on his own, then do we let the youth alone lead the study. That's simply solid discipleship and it's the best way to train our youth; not only for Bible Study, but in everything. So, if you have youth who are struggling to really get into the Small Group Bible Study, go back to the basics and give them the training from experienced adult leaders that they need.

Then we ask a follow-up comprehension or application question to help bring home the point that the message of Jesus Christ from the text is meant for everyone. The leader wants people to be able to speak about what they've learned about Jesus because we want everyone to be able to share what the Bible says about Christ as our witness to the world. So this is a very important part of the Bible Study. Example questions may be, "How would you use this text to tell someone about Jesus?" or "How has what we've studied strengthened your faith?" These questions will do more than summarize the text, but will also end up summarizing it, as well. Remember, the Small Group Bible Study is a witnessing method for pointing our youth and visitors to Christ and equipping them to share the love of Christ with others. If we don't hammer that home, we've missed the point of the Bible Study, and we've missed the point of the Bible. Give it a try.

Is Prayer Another Witnessing Method?

Prayer is a great gift of God. Luther says we pray 1) Because God commanded that we do so, 2) Because he has promised to hear us, 3) Because he has given us the very words to pray so that we know our prayers are pleasing to him. Christians pray. We pray the Lord's Prayer because it's the God-pleasing prayer he taught us. We pray the Psalms as the prayerbook of the Bible. And we pray Scripture back to God as it fits our needs, praise, supplications, and thanksgivings. Sometimes God uses our prayers and our acts as praying Christians to show the world the love of Christ. But is prayer an OAFC witnessing method? No.

If we were to talk about prayer as a witnessing method we would be turning prayer into something that it is not. Prayer is conversation between God and his people. We call God "Father" because we've been baptized into his family through Christ, his Son. That's not something an unbeliever can rightly do, nor would they consciously think of referring to God as a dear and loving Father were it not the predominate language of the Christian Church. Prayer is personal – that's why, when the Pastor prays on your behalf, you should say "Amen" if you agree with his prayer, because Amen means "yes, so shall it be so for me, too." But if we thought of prayer as a witnessing method, it would no longer be about the conversation between you and God, but you would be putting on a show of prayer for the sake of your neighbor. Jesus has some pretty harsh things to say about people who do that very thing in Matthew 6, and, in fact, people doing that very thing are the reason he taught us to pray privately and the reason he taught us the Lord's Prayer. So prayer is not a witnessing method.

The Christian should do all things in prayer, though. Paul says this in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to pray without ceasing. As we live lives that look like Christ, people

will notice and it will make a difference in our world. That's vocation, that's ethics. That's bearing the name of Christ as baptized Christians. That's why our prayers are always "in Christ." But that does not make them witnessing methods. That makes prayer a great gift of God that blesses us, and in the process blesses others.

Do We Really Have to Sing ONLY O AFC Songs at Weekends?

Depends on why you're asking. In O AFC we teach singing as one of our witnessing methods by which we proclaim Jesus Christ and him crucified for us to the world. Our songs strengthen us by feeding us with the Word of God rightly interpreted through song at the same time as it declares that very Word of God to those around us. That we are being fed the Word at the same time as we sing it to the praise and glory of God is why St. Augustine said, "He who sings prays twice," and why Luther said, "Music is the handmaiden of theology."

If you don't know you need to know that not all music is created equal – not even all "Christian" music. Just as there are many denominations because there are many interpretations of Scripture, so many of the songs produced and played on the radio come from those different churches with different interpretations of Scripture. O AFC, as a Lutheran group, has committed itself to teach and preach and sing only pure Lutheran doctrine. That's why our songbook has to be doctrinally approved by our pastors on the Board. We know that the songs in the songbook are doctrinally approved and so we can trust that when we sing those songs we are rightly teaching our kids and sharing with the world the right interpretation of Scripture which produces the firmest faith in Jesus Christ. This is why the hymnals of the LCMS are also great places to find songs for your group to sing, because they are approved songs that correctly teach Christ.

There's far too much "Christian" music out there that says nothing about Jesus, nothing about the Word and Sacraments or the Church, but instead focuses on me and my decision (false theology) or some generic praise choruses that anyone – even non Christians – could sing. That music is not witnessing music. So be careful about what you decide to sing at a weekend. Corrupting music corrupts youth. It doesn't strengthen your faith in the Word of God that declares Christ and him crucified for you and it doesn't have the power to change hearts and minds for Christ as witness if it never gives witness to him. So why use it at O AFC where we tell people we use our music as a witness?

Non-Christian music should be easy then to say, Not at the weekend, for the exact same reasons as above. It doesn't mean other music is "the devil's music" or inappropriate for Christians to listen to. It's not about that. It's simply about the witness we bear during the weekend. As Paul said, "I decided to know nothing among you except Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

What About O AFC Leading Worship?

It's common for O AFC to participate in the worship service. Some may find it surprising, though, when a pastor refuses to let O AFC do this. It may also surprise some

that a pastor would ever let O AFC lead the whole service, at all. So what's going on and how do we speak about the role of O AFC in worship?

First, we have to recognize the Lutheran view of worship, and how this differs from that of pop American Evangelicalism's view of worship. Non-liturgical churches typically describe worship as the time when like-minded Christians gather together to offer their "praise and worship" to God. Mostly, this is done through singing and financial offering. Lutherans view worship rather as the time when God has promised to give us His gifts through the means of grace according to his commands and promises. Thus worship for Lutherans is more about receiving God's gifts (which cause us to praise) than it is about the praise itself. This means that Lutheran pastors, as stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1), have the responsibility in worship to make sure that God's Word is faithfully proclaimed and God's Sacraments are rightly administered according to Christ's institution for the sake of the delivery of God's grace according to His promised means.

For some pastors, that means that they will be very protective of their pulpit and altar – the worship service – as the place to which God has appointed them and which he has entrusted to them. **THAT IS ABSOLUTELY UNDERSTANDABLE.** In such places, O AFC should simply ask to have the time before service or after service to share a little about our ministry (what is O AFC, prayer and financial support), present the results, and request the congregation to pray for those to whom we spoke. And we may ask if we could have a presentation of our witnessing methods, etc... during their Bible Studies.

We *can* proudly share with pastors and congregations that our songs have been scrutinized and selected by Lutheran pastors and teachers and determined to faithfully proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Lutheran ways. The service outlines we recommend are based on the standard Lutheran Liturgy and make every effort to proclaim God's Word in Christ Jesus as faithfully as the common liturgy in delivering God's gifts. Thus we are able to lead worship just as an organist or choir would.

Some congregations don't do children's messages. Don't be surprised by this. (It doesn't make a congregation "irrelevant" or "unloving" of children). The children's message is a newer innovation for the Church and pastors and congregations have the right not to do it. In congregations where they do a children's message, though, it's natural to seek to do this with a puppet show **THAT RELATES EITHER TO THE TEXTS OR TO SOME ELEMENT OF THE WORSHIP SERVICE** (because the congregation is there for worship and not for O AFC).

This same concept guides the dramas we do. A pastor may choose – typically for the sake of time – not to let us do a drama during worship. Most services last an hour or so and (to our great surprise) some people are actually offended if service lasts "too" long. Pastors sensitive to this try to accommodate. We should not expect a pastor to shorten his sermon or replace his sermon with our dramas because he has been called to that congregation by God to proclaim the Gospel through his teaching and preaching and administering the Sacraments and we shouldn't do anything to take away from that. Where we are given the time to do a drama during worship, we're called to remember (and act on that reminder) that the drama is about proclaiming the message of Christ crucified and risen for our justification, and not about us.

Leaders should also remember that our youth are traveling to all of these different congregations other than their home church and they have the great

opportunity to see the similarities and differences throughout our Synod in worship. This is a great and worthwhile opportunity for them.

In short, O AFC's participation in worship should not be taken for granted. Worship is a time to receive the gifts of God according to His commands and promises and in some places we're given the opportunity to help lead in this and at other places we're given the gift of simply being able to receive without worrying about anything else.

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These are some of the biggest objections and issues I've heard in O AFC. Hopefully these answers and encouragements can help your local groups to continue to grow and flourish as the great gifts to the Lutheran Church that you are. A closing thought: it's not wrong to question something, nor is it wrong for someone else to question something you're doing. It becomes dangerous, however, when we don't know how to respond. That's why I put this together. If other objections come up, please let us know. We are committed to the Word of God and living rightly by it, so we as O AFC always want to make sure we're testing ourselves against that Word. After 40 years of Lutheran ministry, I believe our commitment and our ministry has remained true. Please help us to remain so with your prayers and your advice.

In Christ,
Pastor Matthew Tasse
Executive Director, O AFC.