

Supplement for family services

(perhemessun osia)

A family service is a service of the whole congregation in which special attention is paid to the needs of families with children. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the order of a family service may be used for the main service of a congregation on a Sunday or church holiday. A family service may also be held on a weekday or some special occasion (e.g. with elementary school students). A family service may be conducted with or without holy communion.

Many characteristic features of the Finnish order for a family service have to do with music. As music is not provided in this manual, it has not been practical to translate the entire order (agenda) for a family service. Instead, only general instructions and translations of some parts of the Finnish order are given here in English. Items given here may be incorporated into the order of a communion service or a service of the Word.

A family service begins like other services (see items # 1 and 2 of a communion service or a service of the Word). At the start, those assisting in the service may enter as a procession, for which the assembly stands.

Introductory words

After the opening words, the speaker can introduce the theme or special features of the service. In most alternatives given below, this part of the introduction is marked with two hyphens (--) before the words leading to confession of sins. The introduction may be freely formulated, but some examples are given here:

Dear friends. --

We have come together in church for a celebration. We have been invited to hear words of the Bible and to pray and to praise God. [We are also invited to the meal of God's family.] Jesus has promised to be with us, and we trust in his promise as we now confess our sins to God.

or

Dear family of God, all of you big and small. --

We have come together as children of God the Father. We can rejoice together and thank him. We can also come together to put our trust in him and to pray for forgiveness in Jesus' name.

or

Dear friends. --

We have been baptized to be God's children. We have come before him as one great family. The heavenly Father knows us and takes care of us. We thank God and pray for forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ.

or

Dear friends. --

We have found our seats in church. In God's great family there is room for all of us. In this family we have both joy and worry. God, our Father, knows our joys and hopes. He also knows what we have done wrong; he knows the things that weigh on our minds. We trust in what Jesus has done for us and we ask God to forgive us.

or

Have you noticed how easily your clothes get dirty when you play? No matter how careful you are, little by little your clothes get dirty. Fortunately they can be washed. Clothes aren't the only things that get dirty in life. The human heart and conscience can also get stained. That happens when we say evil words to others and do what is wrong. People cannot wash hearts, but the heavenly Father can. He promises us in the Bible, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." God washes our hearts clean when we confess what we have done wrong and ask forgiveness in Jesus' name. We now confess our sins to him.

or

(during the Christmas season):

Dear friends. --

We have come together to worship and to discover Christmas for our hearts and homes. Angels have brought us a joyful message that echoes around us: a Savior is born to you! Jesus was born to be our helper; he came to release us from all the power of evil. A light began to shine in darkness.

We praise God and trust in what Jesus has done for us as we ask for the forgiveness of our sins.

or

(during the Passion Week and Easter):

Dear friends. --

We have come to worship at a time when we remember the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus suffered death on a cross because of our sins. God raised Jesus from the dead. We have come to the cross, and we rejoice because we know the message of Easter: Jesus is risen! With his death he has overcome the power of sin and death. We trust in Jesus as we ask that our sins would be forgiven.

or

(in the springtime and at Pentecost):

Dear friends. --

We are together in a celebration of God's family. Just as God wakes up nature to grow and bloom, he also wants to renew us. He has sent his Holy Spirit to remind us of what Jesus has done for us. We may fearlessly trust in his great love and care.

Confession and forgiveness

An example:

Confession of sins

Holy God, dear heavenly Father.
Many things are heavy on my mind.
I have often spoken and acted in a way
that has brought grief to other people
and made you sad.
Forgive all my sins
for Jesus' sake.
I ask this
trusting that you love me.
Declaration of forgiveness
God has given us Jesus to be our Savior.
He hears our prayer
and forgives us all our sins.
He gives us joy and peace as a gift.

A Amen.

or

God hears our prayer.
For Jesus' sake
he forgives all our sins.

A Amen.

A family service continues like any other service, but one reading is enough between the prayer and hymn of the day.

The sermon may include the reading of a passage from the Bible or conclude with one. The sermon may employ other forms of expression besides speech (e.g. drama). After the sermon, the Apostles' creed is said or a song containing a confession of faith is sung. If the creed is said, it may be followed by a hymn or other music.

Prayer of intercession

An example:

Dear heavenly Father. Thank you that we can come to you as your children. You have promised to hear us.

We pray for all who are ill and for those who are worried because someone dear to them is ill. Thank you that you can help them.

We pray for our homes. Help us to love one another. Teach us also to forgive and to ask for forgiveness. We pray for our friends and relatives; give your blessing to them. Comfort those who are sad because someone close by has died. Thank you for the home in heaven with you.

We pray for children. Protect them at home and when they play; protect them when they are traveling or in school or a children's club or day care. Give guidance to children wherever they are, and give them your angels for protection.

We thank you for our own congregation. Thank you that we have heard about Jesus in this place. Bless bishop NN of our diocese and the workers of our congregation, and bless those who have gone far away from home to spread the news about Jesus.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this country. Thank you for the beauty of nature. Thank you for peace and all the good things you have given us. Bless the leaders of this land and all who have authority to make decisions.

We pray for those people in the world whose life is more troubled than ours. Please make wars stop, and let everyone enjoy peace. Help those who do not have enough food or clothes; help those who are homeless. Help us to remember people who have difficulties in life.

Heavenly Father, thank you that you are with us every day. Lead all of us home to heaven to be with you.

The family service continues following the order of a communion service or a service of the Word.

In a family service with holy communion, the following prayers may be used:

Eucharistic prayer

Prayer and the words of institution

Heavenly Father, you have created everything good. In your love you sent your Son Jesus to be a friend and Savior of all of us. As the good shepherd he helped everyone and laid down his life for us. He died on the cross so that we would receive the joy of forgiveness. He rose up from the grave so that we could live forever. He gave us the holy supper so that the whole family of God would share it as a meal of thanksgiving.

*Our Lord Jesus Christ,
on the night when he was betrayed,
took bread, blessed (✙), broke the bread
and gave it to his disciples, saying,
"Take, eat; this is my body
which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me."*

*In the same way he took the cup, thanked (✙) and said,
"Drink from it, all of you.
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
which is shed for you
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink from it,*

in remembrance of me.”

Heavenly Father, we rejoice for everything that Jesus has done for us. Give us your Holy Spirit to give us faith to receive Jesus in the holy supper. Thank you for your great gift.

A Amen.

Prayer of thanksgiving

P Let us pray.
We thank you, heavenly Father,
for the gift of the holy supper.
Thank you for your love toward us.
Help us to live close to you
and close to one another.
Keep us on the way to heaven.
Hear our prayer
for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ.

A Amen.