

A Guide to Worship

An Introduction to the “What” and “Why” of Christian Worship



Welcome

If you're new to Eucharist Church or exploring Christian faith, you might find yourself in the midst of the worship service wondering, “*What is happening, and why?*” These are important questions. This pamphlet offers a guide to the various elements of a Christian worship service. *See the back page for a glossary of terms (found in **bold**).*

What Is Liturgy?

Liturgy is the use of prepared words, songs, rituals, gestures, and prayers that compose the pieces of a structured form of worship. The term *liturgy* comes from a Latin word that means “a work of the people.” It's a wonderful (and ancient) way that everyone can participate in worship. If you're new to liturgy, it might be a tad confusing or foreign at first. But if you stick with it, you'll discover its power to enrich and shape your private prayer life outside of our Sunday worship gathering.

Order and Freedom

Some people may wonder if having a set order of service and using prepared written words might limit our freedom in worship. Undoubtedly, structure limits certain kinds of freedom. However, it could also be argued that order might actually increase freedom!

C.S. Lewis compared ordered worship and liturgy to dancing. When you first learn to dance, you pay attention to all of the details of where your feet go, when to turn and which direction you should be facing. But once you get the hang of dancing, you leave all of that behind; you actually achieve a new kind of freedom and an ability to be present with the one with whom you are dancing. You can spin all over the dance floor with joy and abandon. Ordered, liturgical worship offers the same possibility. It provides the structure and pattern within which



we can really “dance” together as a community with the Spirit of God. It’s important to know that at times we spontaneously or intentionally deviate from our plan when we sense the **Holy Spirit’s** leading. This is also part of a classic understanding of worship—we worship a *living God* who is a personal being and not a system of ideas.



Symbols, Rituals, Culture, and Tradition

Any community that moves through time and across cultures, transitioning from one generation to the next, must by necessity develop a distinctive culture itself. This is a good and important process that has shaped the life of the people of God for more than 5,000 years. The culture and traditions that develop over generations serve to nurture and sustain the living community by embodying its story, maintaining its distinctive values, and nurturing its identity. The Church embodies traditions, rituals, and practices that can be traced back to the earliest Christian gatherings, and before that to the people of Israel.

At Eucharist Church we make an intentional effort to incorporate as much of the richness of our Christian heritage into our worship as we can. Our community is shaped by the Christian calendar with its holy days and feasts. In worship you’ll see people utilizing certain body positions such as bowing, kneeling, raising hands, or making the sign of the cross. You’ll notice that the clergy use special garments (“vestments”) with colors and symbols on them. All around the room there are visual and other sensory reminders that what we’re doing is not just business as usual. None of this is random or superstitious. Each ritual, symbol, and action has a special meaning, adding to the beauty and richness of our community life and shaping us deeper and deeper into the image of Christ. If you’re curious about anything, feel free to ask.

The Order of Worship

Christian worship happens in four major movements. This four-part movement is nearly universal, found in churches all around the world, going back to the beginning of Christian worship in the first century. It is only in recent decades that this order has been lost by many

contemporary churches. Not only is this four-part form of worship deeply historical, it communicates important theology through its very shape.

First Movement: Gathering

Responding to God's Call

Worship originates in God's calling. We are forever responding to His love. None of us become Christians by accident or by our own cleverness; we're called by God. He is the one who calls our community into being and makes it a **communion** with Himself.

Upon entering the worship space you will find a **baptismal font** in the back of the sanctuary, at the end of the aisle in line with the altar up front. Christians are invited to renew their baptismal commitment to Christ, and reminded that baptism is the entrypoint to this communion. People traditionally do this by touching their finger to the water and making the sign of the cross. Some people also bow a knee or bow their head upon moving toward the altar to take a seat in preparation for worship to begin.



In this first movement, we are gathered and reminded of our identity in Christ through songs and prayers. The service begins with a **procession** consisting of a group of people bringing light (candles) and carrying the **Gospel Book** following the cross up to the front. The symbolism in this act is rich—the gospel, the light that we have to offer the world, is found in the path of the cross (life through death). The procession is a reminder that everywhere we go we are following Christ, crucified and resurrected.

First Things First

Our first priority is to recognize God as the center of our attention. This is why we begin our service with this opening acclamation: *“Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and blessed be His Kingdom now and forever.”* In saying this we're acknowledging to God, to ourselves, and each other that we are here to worship God.

Collects

Collects (pronounced KAW-lekts) are prayers designed to collect the minds and hearts of the worshipers. The first Collect we read is called the Collect of Purity. It is prayed together, in unison, as the church. We pray that God will cleanse the thoughts of our hearts that we may perfectly love and worship Him. The next Collect is the Collect of the Day. Each Sunday this Collect changes. It follows the Church Calendar, and sets the theme for that particular Sunday.

Second Movement: Word

Hearing the Good News

In the second movement of the worship service we receive the **Word of God** in readings from the Bible, a sermon, and in reciting the central creed of Christian faith.

Scripture Readings

Historic Christian worship has always included readings from the Old Testament, the Psalms, the New Testament letters (epistles), and the Gospels (the four books that tell Jesus' story). This means that if you come to worship each week you will hear a lot of the Bible read over time. After each Scripture reading, the person reading will say, "*The Word of the Lord*," and then the congregation will respond,

"*Thanks be to God.*" This is a way of reminding ourselves of the irreplaceable gift we have in the Christian Scriptures, which collectively illuminate for us the revelation of God in Christ.



The gospel reading is the last one read. All are invited to stand as a small procession of the **deacon** and the **crucifer** walk into the midst of the congregation to read the text from there. This is to symbolize the very gospel itself: Jesus, the Living Word, came and dwelt among us. The reader will say, "A reading from the Gospel according to **Saint**_____." The congregation then responds, "**Glor**y to You Lord Christ," making a small sign of the cross with their thumb over their forehead, lips, and chest. This is to remind us to ever keep the gospel in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts.

The Sermon

The sermon is an opportunity for the **pastor** to explain, en flesh, and bring personal and collective application to the meaning of the texts read in light of Christ. The sermon is offered as an instrument of the Holy Spirit to form our hearts more and more in love for God and in love for each other. Sometimes the sermon includes a challenging message to the congregation; other times it is more focused on a message of comfort and encouragement. In all cases it is meant to build up the **Body of Christ**, deepen faith, and call people to faithfulness, while inspiring people to be further conformed to the image of Christ.

The Creed

The Nicene **Creed** goes all the way back to the fourth century when it was constructed from earlier creeds and the words of Scripture in response to a crisis threatening the essence of the Christian understanding of God. Ever since, it has been used as the standard by which we express our understanding of the Christian God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You'll notice it has three parts—one corresponding to each member of the Trinity. Although the leader asks for people to

stand and say it together, no one should feel compelled to say it unless he or she has come to believe what it says.

Prayers of the People

Next, we move into a time of prayer for others called the Prayers of the People. This time of prayer happens in many forms. The point is to intercede on behalf of a diversity of people, situations, and needs. We pray for the Church, the world, the nation, the local concerns of our city, and our parish. The prayers include thanksgiving, intercession, and various requests.



Confession of Sin

What we've experienced up to this point in the service has all been fixated on the revelation of God through His Word. In response to this, it leads us to recognize who we are (in contrast to who God is) and how we have wandered from God's calling—to love Him with our whole heart and love our neighbors as ourselves. For this reason we take a moment or two in silence to bring ourselves to God and ask Him for forgiveness and mercy. We do this not in anxious fear, but in confidence that God has promised forgiveness, which is available to all who confess, repent, and trust in Christ. We take a posture of humility (kneeling) and then pray a prayer of confession together. The **priest** then speaks the **absolution**—the words of Christ's forgiveness—over the congregation. For many, this is one of the most sacred and meaningful moments in the service. It's an opportunity to be freed from burdens of guilt and shame while simultaneously renewing our relationship with God.

Passing the Peace

After confessing our sin and receiving forgiveness, we take the peace we have received from Christ and extend it to each other by saying, *"The peace of the Lord be with you."* These words are accompanied by a handshake or a hug (or a kiss in some cultures). This is a time of joy. It's not just a formality; sometimes this little interaction can open up healing between people in the

congregation who have found themselves unreconciled for some reason or another. It also paves the way for the meaning of Holy Communion (third movement).



Third Movement: Table

Tasting the Good News

This movement brings us to the culmination of the service. We encounter the beating heart of the Christian faith: the Communion of eternal love revealed to us as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At the table, we re-enact the story of how the life of the Trinity—Communion itself—is extended to all of God’s creation through Christ. *For a spiritual and theological exploration of the meaning of Communion, ask for the FAQ about Communion at the Welcome Table.*



The Offering and Offertory

The third movement begins with what might seem like a rather menial or perhaps even unsacred act: collecting money. However, something significant is happening in this moment. We, the people, offer bread and wine for Communion. There is interesting meaning found in offering back to God a part of His creation bound within a layer of human involvement (we offer God bread, not merely wheat; wine, not merely grapes). God accepts our gifts, the labor of our

hands, and chooses to indwell them.

While the table is being prepared by the priest and deacon, we sing a song of thanksgiving and dedication. This all happens while the offering is being collected. This is not merely about the church paying its bills. This is the moment where we recognize that all of the good gifts in our lives—our food, our jobs, our relationships, our bodies, life itself—come from God. We recognize that behind and around and within the material dimensions in which we live is a much larger,



deeper, and more foundational dimension: the spiritual. When we offer our monetary gifts in thanksgiving we connect the dots between the goodness of God’s creation and the good God who created it all. Even if a person has arranged an electronic donation and has nothing to put in the bowl, we still take this time to recognize God’s generosity toward us.

How much should a person give? There is no universal rule. We challenge people to invite the Holy Spirit to lead them and to act from faith and generosity. Traditionally Christians have recognized that a good benchmark is 10% of their income (inspired by the Old Testament tithe). However, some clearly will need to give more than that while others might have to give less as they struggle in a season of hardship (and may even find themselves beneficiaries of others’ generosity via the church’s benevolence fund in some cases). Whatever the circumstances, the purpose of this act is gospel-inspired generosity and thanksgiving.

After the table has been set and the offerings collected, we sing Doxology—an ancient song praising God for all things—as the offerings are brought forward.

The Great Thanksgiving

As our focus comes to rest on God’s table (the altar), we say a series of prayers as a community together. The celebrant (priest) says certain parts and others are said in unison. These prayers follow an ancient pattern going all the way back to the first century. It starts with a prayer calling us to lift up our hearts to the heavenly courts where worship is continuous in the invisible spiritual realm (called the *Sursum Corda*). We are caught up in the songs and prayers of angels. The underlying assumption of the liturgy is that earth is being scooped up into heaven as a foretaste of the Kingdom we await.

As the liturgy continues, the next element is a prayer recounting God’s mighty acts in history, followed by a remembrance of the Last Supper and the words He spoke. Then comes a special prayer asking for the Holy Spirit to make the simple elements of bread and wine—for us, the very Body and Blood of Jesus (called the *Epiclesis*). There is a beautiful mystery transpiring in this act, something discernable only by faith.

Finally, we pray the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples (the “Our Father” or “Lord’s Prayer”). After this collective prayer, the bread is broken. This point of the service is called **The Fraction** and it is a visual reminder of Christ’s body broken for us. Then we are invited to come participate in the “marriage supper of the Lamb.” This phrase from the Book of Revelation combines a number of images and meaning associated with the act of receiving Holy Communion. It reminds us that what we are experiencing at the Table is a foretaste of what we will receive in and through Christ at the last day.



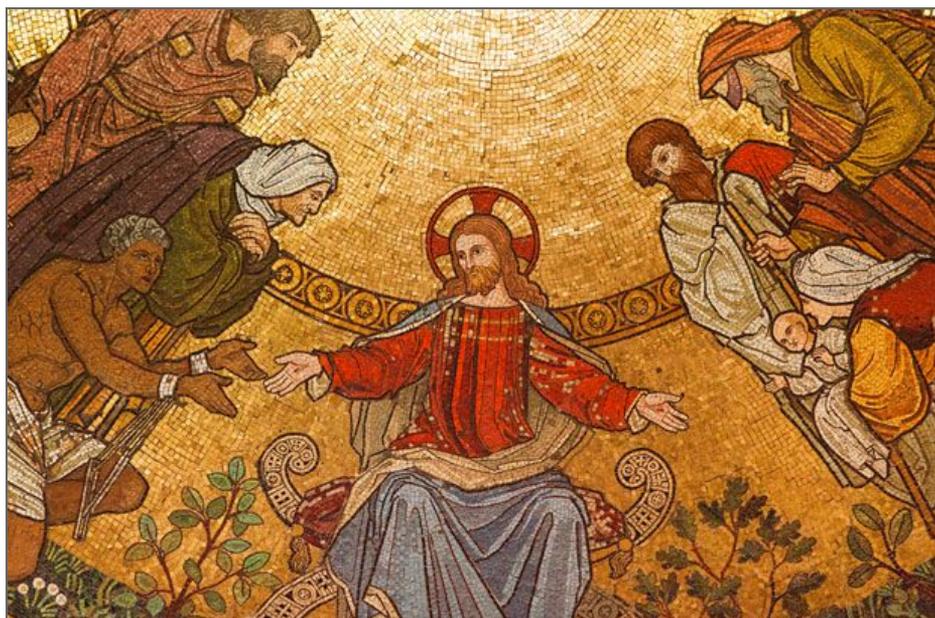
Holy Communion

All baptized¹ and committed Christians (regardless of Christian denomination) who desire peace with God and their neighbor, and who intend to live under the **Lordship of Jesus** are welcome to participate in this meal. Saint Paul in I Corinthians 11 warns his readers about taking the Body and Blood of Christ casually or inappropriately. So we do our best to receive Communion simultaneously with sober-minded humility and deepest joy. None of us is worthy of this meal, which is precisely the point, and why we must receive it by grace in humility. In taking the very presence of Christ into ourselves we recognize that we are intimately connected to God and to the entire Church around the world and through time.

At this time, the celebrant invites people to come forward to receive Holy Communion. If you are not baptized or are not receiving Communion, you are still invited to come forward and receive a blessing. Simply cross both of your arms over your chest to signify you'd like a blessing. If you'd rather remain in your seat, we invite you to use this time for prayer and reflection.

When you come forward to receive the bread, the server will offer it to you. The appropriate response to the words of the server is to quietly say, "**Amen.**" Some people find this a fitting time to make the sign of the cross. Communion can be received either by intinction (dipping the piece of bread into the wine) or by eating the bread and then drinking directly from the chalice. We request those who are sick to receive Communion by intinction. If you prefer a gluten-free option, please ask the Eucharist server at the time you receive.

¹ If you are not yet baptized but desire to receive Communion, we encourage you talk to a pastor afterward about baptism. **Baptism** is the formal act of initiation into the Body of Christ that, historically speaking, has always preceded receiving Communion. There is a sacramental and theological reason for this—we are initiated into the Body of Christ before we are "renewed" as the Body of Christ (another way of talking about the meaning of Communion).



Songs, Prayer, and Healing

During the time when people are coming forward to receive Communion and blessings, we also remember the needs of the poor with a voluntary *Love Offering*, also known as *Almsgiving*. All gifts placed in the box on the Prayer Table go directly to the project mentioned during the service. As people receive the **Sacrament**, we sing songs of thanksgiving and dedication to God. We take this time to soak in the presence of God. Members of the prayer team are available in the back of the church space to pray for people who would like healing, comfort, encouragement, discernment, and wisdom during this time. The prayer team is also available after the service.

Immediately following the receiving of Communion, the church stands together to pray the Postcommunion Prayer. This prayer is a summary of the service and all the good gifts God has bestowed upon us. It also sets up the final part of the service when we pray, "Send us now into the world in peace..."

Fourth Movement: Sending

Embodying Good News to the World

As we receive the Body and Blood of Christ by faith, *we become what we eat*—in some mysterious way we are made participants in the **incarnation** of Christ. Our life is joined to His life. His mission becomes our mission. This is a profoundly important aspect of what happens in Communion and has implications to how we carry ourselves throughout the rest of the week.

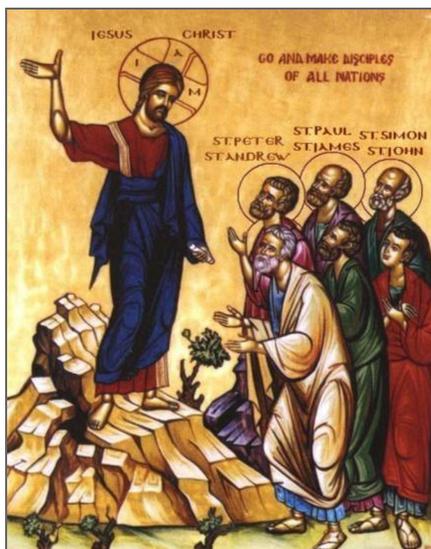
Each Sunday as we gather in worship and take the sacrament, we are reminded of who we are in Christ, and how we are joined together, both as a local fellowship and as a global, historical communion (the “*one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church*” in the *Nicene Creed*), into the one Body of Christ. You could say that we *remember* as we are *re-membered* into Christ’s Body. As Christ’s

Body, our calling is to continue the very ministry Jesus performed when He was here in bodily form among us in first-century Galilee and Judea: proclaiming the gospel, healing, casting out evil spirits, embodying God’s presence, loving and caring for the poor, and more.

Blessing and Sending

As the service comes to a close, we are blessed in the name of God by the priest. There are many different forms of this priestly blessing, and it’s largely up to the priest to give words to the blessing. Oftentimes, the words are chosen from Scripture and speak into the theme of the service or sermon. However, one part of the blessing never changes, and that is invocation of the Triune God. The priest will always end the blessing with, “...and the blessing of God Almighty: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you, now and always.” All of our worship flows from the goodness of the Triune God whom we adore.

The service ends as it began—with a procession of the cross toward the doors of the church—reminding us that all of Christian life is lived following the crucified and resurrected Christ. We go forth in the name of Christ, now commissioned to be sent into the world to be the hands and feet of Christ. We are invited to love and serve all with whom we come in contact. We are challenged to proclaim God’s goodness and announce the hope we have in Christ. In many



cases this “sending” finds its first tangible opportunity in loving each other at the refreshments table while we listen and care for each other as a church family.

Questions and Further Curiosity

If you have additional questions or would like to talk with someone about what you’ve experienced or read, please talk to a pastor or someone at the Welcome Table. For a chance to sit down and discuss this in a more in-depth manner, please feel free to email a member of our clergy team (see our website).

Glossary of Terms

The Church has come to use many words that can sometimes be confusing to those who are new to faith or to those who have not grown up within the life and tradition of the Church. Even for those who have been Christians their whole lives, some words are obscure and confusing. This glossary is intended to help bring some measure of clarity.

Absolution: The words of Christ’s forgiveness spoken by the priest over those who have confessed and desire to be reconciled to God and live in repentance.

Acclamation: Something proclaimed aloud; in worship, this refers to the beginning words of the service.

Acolyte: A person who assists the priest at the altar.

Amen: From a Hebrew word that means “so be it” or “may it be” or “I agree.”

Baptism: The sacrament of initiation into the Church, the Body of Christ; immersion in water (either by pouring over the head or preferably by full submersion).

Baptismal font: A bowl or fountain with water; sometimes used for infant baptism, but more regularly for reminding Christians of their baptism upon entering the church for worship or prayer.

Blessing: Invoking God’s name and power for the purpose of goodness.

Body of Christ: A primary New Testament image for the Church; the people of God in Christ. The Body of Christ speaks to the Church’s mission of continuing Jesus’ bodily ministry under His leadership as the “Head” (see I Cor. 12 and Col. 1).

Catholic: Meaning “from the whole”; universal.

Communion: Meaning “participation, fellowship, being united as one.” Also refers to the act of receiving the bread & wine (Jesus’ Body and Blood); the Christian sacrament of communion with God (Holy Communion/Eucharist).

Creed: From the Latin “credo” meaning “I believe.”

Deacon: A person set aside by the Church through ordination to serve the priest and bishop in caring for the Church, proclaiming the Scriptures, and serving with a special emphasis on assisting the poor and the sick.

Eucharist: Another name for Holy Communion; a Greek word meaning “thanksgiving.”

Epiclesis: The invocation of the Holy Spirit into the bread and the wine.

Fraction: The part of the Great Thanksgiving when the priest breaks the bread in half to symbolize Christ's broken body for us.

Glorify: The uncontainable surpassing brightness, goodness, and majesty of God.

Gospel Book: The book containing the four books of the Bible that tell Jesus' story from which the gospel reading for the day is read. It is sometimes processed with the cross, held up high, kissed, and often adorned with a decorative cover to give it a special sense of honor.

Grace: God's unmerited generosity toward humanity; experienced tangibly as forgiveness, mercy, strength, and goodness.

Great Thanksgiving: The name for the entirety of the Eucharistic prayer.

Holiness: An attribute of God attempting to describe His otherness, intense goodness, and transcendence. It is used to describe people, places, or things that have come into close association with God. People who live in humility and faith before Christ, obedient to Him, are being made holy (the process of sanctification).

Holy Spirit: The third person of the Godhead; there is one God who eternally exists as three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Incarnation: The experience of Jesus (God the Son) being born as a human, taking on human flesh and living among us; God inhabiting materiality.

Lord: A title for God/Jesus. It means "master" or "ruler."

Love offering (Almsgiving): A financial gift given from the heart, often for the poor; alms.

Pastor: A "shepherd" of God's people; typically this title is given to bishops, priests, and deacons.

Priest or Father (Fr.): In the Christian tradition, "priest" or "father" is the common term for what was known in the New Testament Greek as a "presbyter" (elder). The priest is set apart/ordained by the bishop and authorized to consecrate the Eucharist/Holy Communion and offer leadership over the local congregation. Ordained priests are not priests in the Old Testament sense (someone who mediates God's presence). Biblically speaking, all Christians are the "priestly" people of God (I Peter 2) in Christ, the High Priest.

Procession: A group of people who walk down the aisle carrying the cross, candles, the Gospel Book or any other worship element.

Sacrament: Literally in Greek, a "mystery"; a physical or material act/ritual in which God has promised to be spiritually present. Baptism and Eucharist are the primary sacraments, though other acts are understood as having sacramental value.

Saint: Refers to any person who is a Christian; in Church tradition this label applies to those Christians who have been identified as especially worthy of emulation in character and faithfulness to Christ.

Sursum Corda: A prayer used at the start of the Great Thanksgiving. It's a call to "lift up [our] heart[s]".

Word of God: A phrase with a double meaning—1) The Bible is "God's word" (see Hebrews 4:12-13); 2) Jesus is understood as the ultimate "Word of God" or the "Living Word" (see John 1).