

**A Guide to Worship
at
Union
Presbyterian Church**



From the Pastor

Welcome to Union Presbyterian Church! We are so glad you are worshiping with us, and it is my prayer that you will encounter the presence of the living God today in worship.

Often, when people visit a new church, they have questions, and many of those questions are concerned with worship: how we worship and why we do what we do in worship. I have prepared this little booklet to help answer some of those questions. It contains a walkthrough of our worship service (called The Service for the Lord's Day), with a brief description of each element of worship and why each element is included in the service.

Much of the material in this booklet was adapted from the rubrics (instructions for worship) in the *Book of Common Worship* (2018). The *Book of Common Worship* is the standard worship text in the Presbyterian Church (USA), commended for use by all congregations in our denomination. The order of worship (or *ordo*) found in the *Book of Common Worship* is based on scriptural principles of worship as they are expounded in the Directory for Worship in our *Book of Order*, which is a part of our church's constitution.

If after looking at this guide you have other questions about worship here at Union Presbyterian Church, I am always happy to answer them. Please feel free to call me here at the church at 319-372-1424 or email me at pastor@unionpresfm.org.

May God bless you as we worship together today!

John Allen T. Bankson

THE SERVICE FOR THE LORD'S DAY

With its focus upon scripture and sacrament, the main body of the service moves from hearing to doing, from proclamation to thanksgiving, and from Word to table.

GATHERING

We gather in response to God's call, offering praise in words of scripture, prayer, and song. We acknowledge our sinfulness and receive the declaration of God's forgiveness.

WORD

Scriptures are read and their message is proclaimed. Psalms, hymns, spirituals, or anthems may be sung between the readings. Responses to the proclamation of God's Word include expressions of faith and commitment, and the offering of prayers for worldwide and local needs.

EUCHARIST

As hearing becomes doing, the tithes and offerings of the people are gathered, and the table is set with bread and wine. We are invited to the table of the Lord. Prayer is offered in which God is praised for creation and providence, Christ's work of redemption is remembered with thanksgiving, and the Holy Spirit is invoked upon and in the church. The bread is broken, and the bread and wine are served to the people.

SENDING

We are sent forth with God's blessing to serve.

THE SERVICE FOR THE LORD'S DAY

Description of the Elements of Worship

From its beginning, the Christian community has gathered on the first day of the week to hear the scriptures read and proclaimed and to celebrate the Lord's Supper. This day has special significance, since it was on "the first day of the week" that Jesus' followers discovered the empty tomb and met the risen Lord.

Recognizing the importance of the resurrection, the New Testament community called the day of the week on which Christ rose "the Lord's day" (Acts 20:7; Rev. 1:10). The Lord's Day, the first day of the week, is the center of the church's calendar.

In the ancient story of creation, this day marked the beginning of creation. On the first day, God spoke light into being, separating light from darkness.

In Christ's resurrection, Christians saw the beginning of the "new creation" and came to regard the day of resurrection as "the eighth day of creation." The Lord's Day is therefore a sign of God's kingdom and of hope.

Gathered on the Lord's Day, Christians celebrate the age to come, which was revealed in the risen Christ, by remembering the words and deeds of Jesus and celebrating the presence of the risen Christ among them in the Word proclaimed and in the bread and cup of the Eucharist.

GATHERING

Worship begins with God. God takes the initiative and calls us into being. In the name of Christ we answer God's call and assemble as the community of faith.

As we gather, some worshipers informally greet one another as members of the household of faith. All are encouraged to pray silently or engage in quiet meditation. The opening voluntary (music offered to open worship) is a curtain through which we enter into the spirit of worship. It helps us focus our attention on God and God's kingdom.

OPENING SENTENCES

We are called to worship God. Words from scripture are spoken or sung to proclaim who God is and what God has done. We are thus reminded that our worship centers in God and not in ourselves. "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (Ps. 124:8).

GATHERING HYMN (OR PSALM)

We sing praise to God in a hymn or psalm which tells of God's greatness, majesty, love, and goodness.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

An opening prayer is said, called the Prayer (or Collect) of the Day, which often sums up the themes of the Scriptures to be read and proclaimed during the service. The people respond with “Amen” to this and all other prayers offered by the minister or other worship leaders. In the corporate response “Amen” (Hebrew, meaning “so be it”) we affirm our participation in the prayer and embrace it as our own.

CONFESSION AND PARDON

In words of scripture we are called to confess the reality of sin in personal and common life. Claiming the promises of God sealed in our baptism, we humbly confess our sin.

Confession is made by using a prayer, a penitential psalm, or appropriate music. Whatever the form, it will engage us in acknowledging our sinfulness and in confessing our sin to God. A period of silence may be observed before, within, or following the confession of sin. Music of a penitential character may follow the prayer, such as the singing of the ancient *Kyrie eleison* (“Lord, have mercy”).

Having confessed our sin, we remember the promises of God’s redemption, and the claims God has on all human life. The assurance of God’s forgiving grace is declared in the name of Jesus Christ. We accept God’s forgiveness, confident that in dying to sin, God raises us to new life. Because our assurance of forgiveness is based on the promises of God sealed in our baptism, the pastor pronounces the assurance of pardon from the baptismal font.

ACT OF PRAISE

With gladness, we praise God in song, for the gift of God’s grace brings joy. The response is often the “Glory to God” (*Gloria in excelsis*) or the “Glory to the Father” (*Gloria Patri*).

WORD

Worship now moves to the reading, proclaiming, and hearing of God’s Word.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

This prayer seeks the illumination of the Holy Spirit and calls upon God to make us receptive to the life-giving Word, which comes to us through the scripture.

FIRST READING (Usually from the Hebrew Bible, a.k.a. “Old Testament”)

PSALM OF THE DAY

SECOND READING (Ususally from one of the Epistles)

TIME WITH YOUNG DISCIPLES (Children’s Message)

SEQUENCE HYMN

GOSPEL READING

The scripture readings are usually those suggested in the Revised Common Lectionary, which is used by most Protestant churches in the United States. A lectionary is a systematic way to read through major portions of scripture over a period of time. The Revised Common Lectionary is a three-year set of readings, designated as Year A, Year B, and Year C.

The Psalm usually relates thematically to the First Reading. Since the Psalter was the original “hymnal” of God’s people and intended to be sung, we usually sing the Psalm of the Day, but sometimes we read it responsorially or in unison.

A hymn called the Sequence Hymn precedes the proclamation of the Gospel. Since the Gospel reminds us that Jesus Christ, the Word of God Incarnate, came and dwelt among us, we remain standing, following the Sequence Hymn, for the Gospel reading.

SERMON

When the Bible has been read, its message is proclaimed in a sermon or other form of exposition of God’s Word. The God who speaks in scripture speaks to us now. The God who acted in biblical history acts today. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ is present in the sermon, offering grace and calling for obedience. The *Second Helvetic Confession* (a part of our *Book of Confessions*) says, “The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.”

The proclamation of God’s Word in scripture and sermon invites a response of faith. We respond in affirmation of faith, prayer, and offering.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

We respond to the proclamation of the Word by affirming the faith.

The faith of the church both shapes our lives and expresses the hope and expectancy that are a part of the Christian life. From early in the church’s life, an affirmation of faith has been central in corporate worship. Candidates for Baptism gave assent to the faith in the words of the Creed, and upon their baptism were admitted to the Eucharist. As those who are baptized, whenever we say the creed we reaffirm the profession of faith made in our baptism. For this reason, the pastor leads the affirmation of faith from the font.

We affirm the faith by saying or singing a creed of the church. The Nicene Creed and the Apostles’ Creed express the faith tradition of the whole church, the faith in which we were baptized.

When Baptism is celebrated, we profess the faith using the Apostles’ Creed as a part of the baptism. The Apostles’ Creed is also said when baptized persons make a public profession of faith for the first time, and on other occasions of reaffirming the baptismal covenant (such as Confirmation). The Apostles’ Creed is also appropriately said when new members are welcomed. The Nicene Creed is traditionally said when the Lord’s Supper is celebrated.

(BAPTISM)

As an act of the whole church, Baptism is celebrated (except for extraordinary circumstances) in the context of corporate worship. When Baptism is celebrated, it appropriately follows the reading and proclaiming of the Word.

As with the Lord's Supper, Baptism is a sign and act of God's self-giving, by which God's grace is made available to us. The sacraments give a distinctive shape to Christian worship and are the primary signs of the covenant of grace.

(PASTORAL RITE OF THE CHURCH)

Response to the Word may include other acts of commitment and recognition. Those previously baptized may make public their profession of faith (the Rite of Confirmation). Baptized believers may reaffirm the covenant into which they were baptized or transfer their church membership. Ordination and installation of church officers and commissioning for service in and to the church may also appropriately be included as responses to the Word.

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION (or THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE)

In response to the Word, prayers are offered, acknowledging God's presence in the world and in daily life. Across the ages the church in its worship has prayed for the church universal, the world, all in authority, and those in distress or need. At no other time in its worship is the community of faith more conscious of the needs of the life of the world. The prayers of the people, like the Lord's Supper, are a response to the Word. As the Eucharist is offered for the life of the world, so too we offer our prayers for the life of the world. For these reasons and many others, the pastor leads prayer from the Communion Table.

We pray for the world because God loves it. God created the world and cares for it. God sent Jesus, who died for it. God is working to lead the world toward the future God has for it. To abide in God's love is to share God's concern for the world. Our prayers should therefore be as wide as God's love and as specific as God's tender compassion for the least ones among us.

Intercession. The congregation prays for worldwide and local concerns.

Supplications. The congregation prays for its own life and ministry.

EUCHARIST

OFFERING

The Christian life is marked by the offering of one's self to God to be shaped, empowered, directed, and changed by God. In worship, God presents us with the costly self-offering of Jesus Christ. We are claimed by Christ and set free. In response to God's love in Jesus Christ we offer God our lives, our gifts, our abilities, and our material goods, for God's service.

From early centuries in Christian history, the offering has been the occasion for presenting the bread and wine to be used in the Lord's Supper. The Eucharist always properly begins with the Offertory.

When the service does not include the Lord's Supper, the offering is followed by a prayer of thanksgiving, ending with the Lord's Prayer, thus preserving the same basic order of worship whether the service includes Communion or not.

INVITATION TO THE LORD'S TABLE

The minister invites the people to the Lord's table using words from scripture. We do not believe the Table is ours, nor does it belong to our denomination or any particular denomination or group: it is the Table of the Lord. We practice open Communion: our Lord invites those who trust in him to share the feast he has prepared.

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

The pastor then leads the people in the Great Thanksgiving (also known as the Eucharistic Prayer). This prayer has been of central importance to this sacrament from very early centuries in Christian worship. Thanksgiving is so important to this sacrament that it has been given the name of Eucharist (from the New Testament Greek word *eucharistia*, meaning thanksgiving).

We praise God for all God's mighty acts in the past, present, and future. God is praised for:

creating all things,
the providence of God,
establishing the covenant,
giving the law,
the witness of the prophets,
God's boundless love and mercy in spite of human failure,
the ultimate gift of Christ,
the immediate occasion or festival.

There may be an acclamation of praise, in which we join in one voice, with choirs of angels and with the faithful of every time and place, in adoration of the triune God: “Holy, holy, holy Lord” (the *Sanctus*), the song of the heavenly host, eternally being sung before God’s majesty (Isa. 6:1–5).

Christ’s work of redemption is recalled with thanks:

his birth, life, and ministry,
his death and resurrection,
the promise of his coming again.
the gift of the Sacrament (which will include the words of institution).

Then we all join in singing or saying a Memorial Acclamation, in which we joyfully acclaim Christ who died, is risen, and will come again.

The Holy Spirit is called upon

to draw the people into the presence of the risen Christ,
and to make the breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup
a communion in the body and blood of Christ,
that the people may be nourished with Christ’s body,
made one with the risen Christ,
united with all the faithful in heaven and earth,
kept faithful as Christ’s body,
representing Christ in ministry in the world,
in anticipation of the fulfillment of the kingdom Christ proclaimed.

The prayer concludes with an ascription of praise to the triune God, followed by the “Great Amen” which all sing or say together.

THE LORD’S PRAYER

Following the Great Thanksgiving, we all pray the Lord’s Prayer together. Even on those Sundays when we do not celebrate Communion, there is a Prayer of Thanksgiving which concludes with the Lord’s Prayer.

In the Presbyterian Church, as in most churches of the Reformed tradition, we use the words “debts” and “debtors” in the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer as this is the most precise translation of the words in the original Greek (Matthew 6:12). They are also the terms used in the Latin Vulgate, in the King James Version of the Bible, and in most modern translations of the Bible.

BREAKING OF THE BREAD (or THE FRACTION)

The pastor takes the bread and breaks it, and pours wine into the cup. We are reminded in this action that Christ’s body was given and his blood was shed for all. This action is usually followed by a “Fraction Anthem” sung by all, such as the *Agnus Dei* (“Lamb of God”).

COMMUNION OF THE PEOPLE

The bread and wine from the table are served to the people. Sometimes we pass the elements from person to person, and other times worshipers come forward to receive Communion.

After all have been served, we offer a unison prayer, thanking God for the gift of Christ in the Sacrament, and asking for God's grace and strength to be faithful disciples.

SENDING

SENDING HYMN (OR PSALM)

We sing a hymn or psalm, usually focusing on our call to go out into the world as followers of Christ.

BENEDICTION (BLESSING) AND CHARGE

The dismissal includes words of blessing, using a Trinitarian benediction such as the apostolic benediction in 2 Cor. 13:13, or other words from scripture. Assured of God's peace and blessing, we are confident that God goes with us to our tasks.

A dismissal or "charge" concludes the service. It is a charge for us to go into the world in the name of Christ. The charge renews God's call to us to engage in obedient and grateful ministry as God's agents to heal life's brokenness. By the power of the Spirit, we are to be in life and ministry what Christ has redeemed us to be.

Instrumental music follows the blessing and charge: we depart through a curtain of music just as we entered into the place, time, and spirit of worship through a curtain of music.

OUTLINE OF THE SERVICE FOR THE LORD'S DAY

GATHERING

Opening Voluntary

Sentences of Scripture

Gathering Hymn

Prayer of the Day

Confession and Pardon

Act of Praise (such as the *Gloria Patri*)

WORD

Prayer for Illumination

First Reading

Psalm

Second Reading

Time With Young Disciples

Sequence Hymn

Gospel Reading

Sermon

Affirmation of Faith (such as the Nicene Creed or Apostles' Creed)

[Pastoral Rite of the Church: Baptism, Confirmation, Ordination, etc.]

Prayer of Intercession

EUCHARIST

Offering

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Great Thanksgiving

Lord's Prayer

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

Prayer After Communion

SENDING

Sending Hymn

Blessing and Charge

Closing Voluntary



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