

PART I: CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP SERVICES

GENERAL WORSHIP SERVICE RESOURCES

“Worship,” according to William Temple’s classic definition, “is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by his holiness, the nourishment of the mind with his truth, the purifying of the imagination by his beauty, the opening of the heart to his love, the surrender of the will to his purpose.” In independent, non-liturgical churches worship services vary considerably—a diversity that is part of the appeal of these congregations. But some things must be constant:

- We seek to worship God in his three persons for his character and praise him for his wonderful works.
- Our worship is grounded in the truth of Scripture and includes the words of Scripture.
- Worship engages the people of God in active participation, and is led by people of sincere and evident Christian commitment.
- Worship and praise may move through a great variety of emotions, but should never be trite or glib. It should elevate the spirit, the mind and the emotions of the believer with the things of the Triune God.
- Worship, when genuine and Spirit-filled, is a powerful evangelistic tool. Where else can the unbeliever see the vitality and love of our great God so clearly?
- Worship is a happy work of the believer’s heart, and is aided by nothing so much as prayer.

Worship services vary from church to church in orders of service, music styles, drama, media, etc., but all should be thoughtfully and prayerfully organized. Different organizing principles can be used:

- A single theme—an attribute or action of God in one of his three persons—may be the focus of a service, with most of the elements chosen around that theme. Often, the theme can be drawn from the pastor’s preaching text and will thus enhance the communication of the Word.
- General worship and praise may move from a more celebratory and joyful tone to a more introspective and prayerful conclusion.
- A service may be structured around the Communion service, with movement in song and word toward the Table, then in celebrating the meal, and finally in response.
- Traditionally, the sermon follows the rest of the worship time, however there are some exceptions: 1) In services observing the Lord’s Supper, the sermon has traditionally come before Communion to prepare God’s people by the Word. 2) Some preaching texts especially address worship themes. Therefore it might be best if the sermon is near the beginning of the service with a time of worship in response. 3) The sermon might be placed in the middle of the service, with an extended time of response afterward for prayer, singing, an invitation, etc.

Though music is often the predominant element in worship, the wide variety of tastes and repertoires in local churches make it impractical to address music in this manual. Sometimes churches forget that other elements of worship are also important. First Timothy 4:13 enjoins the public reading of Scripture, and there are many creative ways to do so. Prayers are another important element (see the suggestions to follow). Testimonies can take all forms—prepared personal accounts of God’s work, finish-the-sentence sharing (e.g., “One verse that comforts me is...”), video stories, etc. Worship can also be enhanced by the verbal arts, like drama, choral readings, monologues and poetry, and by visual arts, like banners, calligraphy, photography, paintings and the projected arts. The elements included here have long been common to many kinds of services.

Calls to Worship

A brief spoken or sung summons to the privilege of worship. It has the effect of focusing the congregation’s attention on the worship they are about to bring. While a Call to Worship can be a song, or a non-scriptural invitation, biblical statements like the following are especially fitting.

Psalm 5:3: In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.

Psalm 9:9-10: The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.

Those who know your name will trust in you,
for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.

Psalm 11:4: The LORD is in his holy temple;
the LORD is on his heavenly throne.
He observes the sons of men;
his eyes examine them.

Psalm 62:5-8: Find rest, O my soul, in God alone;
my hope comes from him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.
My salvation and my honor depend on God;
he is my mighty rock, my refuge.
Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge.

Psalm 84:1-2: How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD Almighty!
My soul yearns, even faints,
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh cry out
for the living God.

Psalm 84:10-12: Better is one day in your courts
than a thousand elsewhere;
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.
For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favor and honor;
no good thing does he withhold
from those whose walk is blameless.
O LORD Almighty,
blessed is the man who trusts in you.

Psalm 96:1-6: Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Sing to the LORD, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.
For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the nations are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.
Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

Psalm 100: Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.
Know that the LORD is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving

and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.
For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Psalm 118:22-24: The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone;
the LORD has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
This is the day the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalm 122:1-2: I rejoiced with those who said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the LORD."
Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem.

Psalm 145:18-21: The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.
He fulfills the desires of those who fear him;
he hears their cry and saves them.
The LORD watches over all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.
My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD.
Let every creature praise his holy name
for ever and ever.

Isaiah 1:18: "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD.
"Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson,
they shall be like wool."

Isaiah 6:3-4: And they were calling to one another:
"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory."
At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

Isaiah 40:31: ... those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

Micah 6:8: He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

John 4:23-24: Jesus said, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Hebrews 4:14-16: Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us

then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Prayers¹

The best guide and source for prayers is Scripture. Beyond that, there are many books of eloquent and meaningful prayers, most notable perhaps being *The Book of Common Prayer*. The public prayers in non-liturgical churches are customarily extemporaneous but the following ideas will help in shaping those prayers. However, written prayers are opportunities to capture in measured and skilled language the cries of the individual heart, as well as the petitions of an entire church.

Invocation – A short prayer near the beginning of the service asking God to work in the hearts of the worshippers during that service. Traditionally, this has a five part structure: (1) an address to God, (2) a relative clause referring to some characteristic of God, (3) a petition regarding God's work in that service, (4) a result clause, and (5) a concluding doxology. An example would be:

Lord God, you who always make your environment holy, we ask you fill our service with a holy awe and joy this morning, that we might know for certain we have been in the presence of Jehovah, in the name of Jesus, who lives to bring God to us, Amen.

Prayer of Worship – A prayer that focuses strictly on the attributes or actions of God. It works well to focus on one truth about God, in one of his three persons, and meditate on some of its dimensions. For example, this prayer focuses on Jesus as Servant, and draws from several texts:

Lord Jesus, this morning we worship you because you are the Servant of the Lord. Unlike us, who by nature seek to lord it over others, you took the very nature of a servant when you took on flesh and became obedient unto death. You showed such humility when you washed your disciples' feet, and you still show a servant's humility when you forgive our sins and answer our prayers. But even more than serving us, you serve the Father, by being a covenant for the peoples and a light for the nations. Because you have served the Father and us so selflessly, we exalt you. Amen.

Prayer of Confession – The emphasis in contemporary services on praise has obscured the ancient tradition of taking time in worship for confession of sin. One model is the simple prayer of the tax collector in Luke 18, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." A time of silent prayer, allowing personal confession, is common, but biblical prayers are appropriate as well. Following are two biblical examples and one classical liturgical confession:

Psalms 51:1-4, 10-12: Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are proved right when you speak
and justified when you judge....
Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Daniel 9:4-7, 8-10, 17, 19:

O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

¹ Several ideas in this section are from C. John Weborg's article, "Prayer," in *Leadership Handbook of Preaching and Worship*, James D. Berkley, General Editor (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), p.159.

Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame... because we have sinned against you. The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him; we have not obeyed the LORD our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets.

Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.

*The Book of Common Prayer:*²

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare thou those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore thou those who are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake; That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous and sober life, to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.

Words of Assurance – Following a time of confession scriptural assurance of God’s forgiveness and grace should be offered. These are not prayers, obviously, but are offered in connection with prayers. Many verses affirming God’s forgiveness are appropriate. These are some examples:

Psalms 103:8-14: The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.

Psalms 32:1-2, 6-7: Blessed is he
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.
Blessed is the man
whose sin the LORD does not count against him
and in whose spirit is no deceit....
Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you
while you may be found;
surely when the mighty waters rise,
they will not reach him.
You are my hiding place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance.

Matthew 11:28-30: Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

²*The Book of Common Prayer* (Episcopal), (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), p.6.

Passing the Peace – This custom, which is uncommon in the free churches, finds its historical roots in Scripture’s “holy kiss.” The congregation stands, the pastor extends his arms toward them saying, “The peace of the Lord be with you.” The congregation responds in unison, “And also with you.” The pastor may then invite the people to greet one another, “Let us greet one another with the peace of the Lord,” followed by a time of greetings.

Pastoral Prayer – This wide-ranging prayer focuses on the work and needs of the Body. It does not need to be brought by the pastor, but it should reflect the heart and oversight of a shepherd. When no thought is given to the prayer it quickly becomes clichéd and predictable. The prayer should be rooted in biblical priorities—the advancement of the kingdom and the revival of the church. Remember with specificity the ministries and missionaries of the church (perhaps a different one each week). In praying for the sick and sorrowing, pray not only for their health but also for the shaping of character and for faithful endurance.

To emphasize the sense of care for the congregation, the pastor might come down from the platform and stand at the front or even in the aisles. For variety...

- Bring a request and then allow people to pray for that concern in silence
- Ask church leaders to prepare this prayer, or have several people pray various short elements of one prayer.
- Take several requests from the congregation before praying.
- Invite short prayers from the congregation, if they can be heard by all.

The Lord’s Prayer – While there are many biblical prayers that can be used in a service, this is by far the most common. While this prayer may not be a traditional part of the service, it is a valuable asset in our worship, and one with which most people are familiar. This prayer is often attached at the end of another prayer, the pastoral prayer, for example. It is commonly recited from the Matthew 6:9-13 in the King James Version, although the tongue-twisting use of “trespasses” and “those who trespass against us” is frequently replaced by ‘debts’ and ‘debtors’ (drawn from Luke 11:2-4, KJV). The prayer, added at the end of another prayer, is introduced by, “We pray this in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray, ‘Our Father...’” (at which point the congregation will join in spontaneously in praying with the pastor).

Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses [debts], as we forgive those who trespass against us [our debtors]. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Since this is the Lord’s pattern for our prayers, our pastoral prayers may follow this outline, beginning with God’s name, then moving to his Kingdom and will, and on to his provision of daily bread, forgiveness and protection.

Biblical Doxologies

Churches often rely on their songs to express the glory of God, but Scripture offers powerful ‘words of glory’ (which is what doxology means). These doxologies fit naturally in various places in a service—at the conclusion of a prayer, introducing or concluding singing, or at the end of a service instead of a benediction. These brief expressions reaffirm basic biblical theology.

Luke 2:14: “Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

Romans 11:33-36: Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!

Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?

Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay him?

For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:20-21: Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Philippians 4:20: To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Timothy 1:17: Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

1 Timothy 6:15-16: God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

2 Timothy 4:18: The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 4:11: In all things may God be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 5:10-11: And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen

Jude 24-25: To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy-- to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Revelation 1:5-8: To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father--to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

Look, he is coming with the clouds,
and every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him;
and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.

So shall it be! Amen.
"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

Revelation 5:13: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

Revelation 7:12: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

Offertory Sentences

To be read just before or after the offering to remind the church of the scriptural stewardship expectations.

Deuteronomy 16:17: Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.

1 Chronicles 29:10-14: "Praise be to you, O LORD,
God of our father Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.
Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power
and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.
Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom;
you are exalted as head over all.
Wealth and honor come from you;

you are the ruler of all things.
In your hands are strength and power
to exalt and give strength to all.
Now, our God, we give you thanks,
and praise your glorious name.
“But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”

Psalms 24:1-2: The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
for he founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the waters.

Psalms 96:8: Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering and come into his courts.

Proverbs 3:9-10: Honor the LORD with your wealth,
with the firstfruits of all your crops;
then your barns will be filled to overflowing,
and your vats will brim over with new wine.

Malachi 3:10-12: “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,” says the LORD Almighty. “Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the LORD Almighty.

Matthew 2:11: On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

Matthew 6:19-21: Jesus said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 10:8: Jesus said, “Freely you have received, freely give.”

Mark 4:24: Jesus said, “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.”

Mark 8:36: Jesus said, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”

Luke 12:15: Jesus said, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Luke 16:13: Jesus said, “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

Acts 20:35: Remember the words the Lord Jesus himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Romans 12:1: I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

1 Corinthians 16:2: On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

2 Corinthians 8:9: For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

2 Corinthians 8:12: For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7: Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:8: And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

2 Corinthians 9:10-11: Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

Philippians 4:18-19: The gifts you sent... are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Affirmations of Faith

Despite their strong commitment to evangelical orthodoxy, many non-liturgical free churches seldom verbalize their doctrinal commitments in a public service. But statements of faith, whether taken directly from Scripture or from well-established creeds, focus worship on our most precious biblical truths, and help instruct the people of God. Some biblical affirmations of faith are as follows:

We believe:

...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time. (*1 Corinthians 15:3-6*)

We believe that Christ is Lord:

“...who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.” (*Romans 1:3-4*)

We believe:

“...in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” (*Romans 4:24-5:2*)

We believe:

“...Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” (*Romans 8:34*)

We confess our allegiance to Christ Jesus:

“Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death--
even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.” (*Philippians 2:6-11*)

We confess belief in Jesus Christ our Lord:

“He appeared in a body,
was vindicated by the Spirit,
was seen by angels,
was preached among the nations,
was believed on in the world,
was taken up in glory.” (*1 Timothy 3:16*)

Historic Creeds & Statements of Faith

Creeds read as part of a worship service give the congregation opportunity to publicly affirm their faith as well as reinforcing right doctrine. In the case of longer creeds or the denomination’s Statement of Faith, a certain portion may be read in a service, highlighting a particular doctrinal focus for that day. Creeds and Statements of Faith are easily found on the internet. In addition to the two below, other classic doctrinal statements are Irenaeus’s Rule of Faith, the Chalcedonian Creed, Athanasian Creed, Heidelberg Catechism (the most ecumenical of Reformed catechisms and confessions), the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrance (written in 1978 to affirm verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible); and the Evangelical Free Church Statement of Faith (www.efca.org/about-efca/statement-faith).

The Apostles Creed (3rd-4th century A.D.)

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hades; the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic³ Church; the communion of the saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Nicene Creed (Written in 325 A.D. and revised in 381 especially to articulate the nature of Christ.)

I believe in one God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And one holy catholic⁴ and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Benedictions

Bestowing a benediction is a great pastoral privilege. By faith, it is much more than a good wish, but rather a divine blessing granted to God’s people. It is not so much a prayer as a promise made more certain by its being said. During a benediction the pastor should look at his people, and they at him. Many pastors hold one or both hands toward the people (arms high and extended, palms down) as a symbol of a blessing given. It is very useful to memorize the benedictions used most often to allow freedom of expression.

³ catholic means the church universal. The word ‘Christian’ can be used instead..

Numbers 6:24-26: The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.

Psalms 121:1-2, 4-5:

May the Lord answer you when you are in distress;
may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.

May he send you help from the sanctuary
and grant you support from Zion.

May he remember all your sacrifices
and accept your burnt offerings.

May he give you the desire of your heart
and make all your plans succeed.

We will shout for joy when you are victorious
and will lift up our banners in the name of our God.

May the Lord grant all your requests.

Acts 20:32: Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Romans 15:13: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 16:23: The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

2 Corinthians 13:14: May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Ephesians 6:23-24: Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

Philippians 4:7: And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:23: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

1 Thessalonians 5:23: May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17: May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Hebrews 13:20-21: May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Jude 24-25: To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy-- to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Revelation 22:21: The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

Baptism celebrates the believer's entrance into Christ's church. This manual focuses on "believer's baptism" single immersion. (Guidelines for a service of infant baptism can be found in other service manuals.⁴) Believer's baptism reenacts the Christian's conversion. Our death in Christ is symbolized by going under the water, and our resurrection in him by coming up from the water. The water also reminds us of the cleansing we receive in Christ and symbolizes that spiritual baptism by which we become part of the church, Christ's Body. Baptism is the Bible's "public profession of faith" and for that reason is usually accompanied by some verbal testimony or affirmation of faith. It often provides an anchor of assurance to those who wrestle with uncertainty about their salvation.

Baptismal services vary, as do the preparations of baptismal candidates. Churches having baptisteries can incorporate baptisms into regular services if they wish, while those churches using a lake, river, pool, or the baptistery of another church usually build an entire service around the baptisms (which they may not be able to hold as frequently).

While it is customary for the pastor to perform baptisms, there is no biblical reason that other mature and respected believers cannot baptize. This would be a matter of local church policy. Baptism should not be conducted independent of a local church since, among other things, it symbolizes being baptized by the Spirit into one Body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Depending on the customs of the local congregation, children who have made a clear and credible profession of faith and who are old enough to grasp the symbolism of this ordinance may be baptized. Many pastors do not suggest this step to children until they are about 12 years old but sometimes younger children eagerly desire to be baptized. In conference with parents, determine not only if the child has a clear salvation experience but also if he/she can grasp the symbol and significance of baptism as a public profession of faith. If so, and the parents are comfortable with the step, proceed with joy.

Some churches provide white baptismal robes for the candidates, but in their absence, instruct the candidates to dress modestly (swimming suit and T-shirt, for example). When baptizing, the pastor stands to the side of the candidate. The candidate grasps one wrist with the other hand, and with the free hand plugs their nose. The pastor holds the candidate's wrist with one hand, and puts his other on their back, then lowers the candidate into the water and raises them back up. If there is limited space, the candidate must bend their knees. The buoyancy of the candidate makes lifting the person back up easy. It is good to have an attendant waiting as the newly baptized person comes out of the water.

At the very minimum, a baptism should include these elements:

- A clear affirmation of the candidate's faith in Christ
- The baptism, with words of declaration.

The following elements are often woven into a baptismal service:

Scriptural Words of Institution

Our Lord Jesus instituted water baptism prior to his ascension when he commanded, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Sermon or Meditation

A sermon focuses on the Christian's new birth, on Christ's death and resurrection, cleansing from sin, etc. If there is no sermon offer a brief statement on the meaning of baptism and the reason for its practice. There may be unbelievers present, especially guests of the candidates, for whom this is a wonderful evangelistic opportunity.

Scripture

Matthew 3:13-17 - The baptism of Jesus

Matthew 28:18-20 - The Great Commission

Mark 8:34-35 - "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross..."

Acts 2:36-41 - Baptism on the Day of Pentecost

Acts 8:26-38 - Philip baptizes the Ethiopian

Acts 9:17-19 - Peter baptizes Cornelius and his household

Acts 16:29-34 - Paul baptizes the Philippian jailer

⁴ Paul Engle, *Baker's Worship Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), pp.155-168.

Romans 6:1-7 - Baptized into Christ's death
Romans 10:9-10 - "Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord..."
1 Corinthians 12:13 - "We were all baptized by one Spirit..."
Galatians 3:26-28 - "All... baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ..."
Colossians 2:9-12 - "Having been buried with him in baptism..."
1 Peter 3:20b-22 - The symbolism of Noah and the ark

Prayer

Usually this is an extemporaneous prayer, recognizing biblical truths about baptism and thanking God for the candidates and the salvation they are celebrating through this step of obedience. The following is a model:

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for our Lord Jesus Christ. We are grateful that by his death and resurrection he redeemed us from our sin. We know that it is by your grace alone that you have cleansed us and granted us eternal life in your family. We rejoice that we have been baptized by your Holy Spirit into one Body.

We thank you for *the one / for these* who now desires to receive the sign and seal of water baptism in obedience to the command of your Son our Savior. Strengthen N****'s faith now that N**** might continue to walk before you in holiness and righteousness all *his/her* days. This we pray in the name of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Confession of Faith

Option 1:

The candidate gives personal testimony of faith. People nervous about public speaking sometimes forget things they intended to say. Encourage the candidate to write out their testimony or at least the key points. Should a testimony not be a clear evangelical affirmation, the pastor can simply question the person once they finish, "Are you trusting Christ as your personal Savior?" Or the pastor can explain that the candidate has clearly professed Christ to him and then ask the candidate, "N****, have you repented of your sin, put your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and are you determined to follow him as your Lord?" To which the candidate replies, "Yes." The pastor or an elder should hear these testimonies in advance of the service to be sure the person has a clear grasp of salvation. Another option is to show a prerecorded video clip of the person telling of their salvation. This alleviates the problem with stage fright and allows a better control of time in the service.

Option 2:

Our Lord said, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven" (*Matthew 10:32*). I now ask you to confess your faith publicly by answering "I do" to the following questions:

- Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, and in the Holy Spirit as co-equal and co-eternal members of the Trinity?
- Do you believe Christ died for your sins and arose from the dead to give you everlasting life?
- Do you confess that your only hope for salvation from sin and eternal punishment is found in your personal trust in Jesus Christ alone?
- Do you affirm your intention to live for Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit?

(Questions can be shortened or simplified, especially if the candidates are younger.)

Option 3:

Pastor: Do you renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all desires for that world, and the sinful desires of the flesh, so that you will not follow, nor be led by them?

Answer: I renounce them all; and, by God's help, will endeavor not to follow, nor be led by them.⁵

Baptism

The pastor steps to the side of the candidate and says: N****, I now baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Or :

⁵ Adapted from *The Book of Common Prayer* (Episcopal), (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), p.277.

N****, having heard your confession of faith in Jesus Christ, I now baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

A prayer for the candidates (either individually or together) is in order, just before or after the baptism, seeking God's rich blessing for the candidate(s) and a deep assurance of faith in Christ. A Christian friend or family member dear to the candidate or a church leader may offer such a prayer if the pastor does not. Examples of more formal prayers are:

Our Redeeming God, we thank you for your grace that saved each of these brothers and sisters, each unique in their story, yet indebted all alike to Jesus Christ. We ask that this step of obedience will serve to strengthen their faith and assurance of their salvation. We pray, too, that this public step will give them confidence in sharing their faith, and that you will use it even to witness to the unseen powers of your grace. Enrich the fellowship of these *brothers and sisters* in the church and enhance their personal ministries. May they be increasingly conformed to the image of your Son who has cleansed them and raised them to newness of life. In Christ's name, Amen.

Or...

O merciful God, grant that as Christ died and rose again, so this your servant may die to sin and rise to newness of life. Grant that all sinful affections may die in *him/her*, and that all things belonging to the Spirit may live and grow in *him/her*. Grant that *he/she* may have power and strength to have victory, and to triumph against the devil, the world and the flesh. Amen.⁶

OTHER SUGGESTIONS:

- ✓ A candidate may recite or read a favorite Bible verse or passage as part of the testimony.
- ✓ Before baptizing, the pastor might speak personally of some quality in the candidate's spiritual life that is exemplary or encouraging. Others in the congregation might be invited to do the same, so long as there will be somewhat equal treatment of all the candidates.
- ✓ The congregation might sing the candidate's favorite song as he/she comes out of the water.
- ✓ The person who brought the candidate to Christ might be invited to perform or assist in the baptism. A parent might be invited to assist with the baptism of their children or teens.
- ✓ Baptismal Certificates that can serve as a record of the event are available at Christian bookstores. Photographs or video of the baptism can be provided as a keepsake.
- ✓ Provide print or online invitations to the baptism that the candidates can send to friends and family members. Often unchurched people take such invitations seriously. (It might be wise to indicate that no gifts are necessary.)
- ✓ In baptizing someone who cannot physically be immersed, pour or sprinkle water over his/her head. The mode should not be a hindrance to their desire to be baptized.
- ✓ Special bulletin covers for this occasion can be purchased or designed.

⁶ Adapted, *The Book of Common Prayer* (Episcopal), (New York, Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 278.

COMMUNION

Communion is such a rich symbol for the Christian! It harkens back to that distant night in Egypt when the angel of death ‘passed over’ the homes whose doors were marked by the blood of a lamb. It directly commemorates Jesus’ Last Supper, when he established the new covenant in his body and blood. And it is a foretaste of the heavenly feast, “the wedding supper of the Lamb,” when Jesus shall dine with his disciples again, as he promised. Our frequent observances of this ordinance should, over time, bring out its rich colors in meaning, sometimes somber and deeply reflective, and other times joyful and anticipatory. Always respect the very personal way God works through this meal in the hearts of believers, often in ways too deep to explain or express.

Within our tradition, Communion can be observed in a variety of ways. Frequency typically ranges from once a month to once a quarter. Most often, the congregation is served the elements in their seats, but other options are not unusual. In many churches, servers are elders or deacons, however they may simply be men and women of godly reputation. Those who serve unseen in the church, like the members of a committee or the youth sponsors, might serve. “These people are always serving our church,” the pastor can say, “but today you will see them as they serve us.”

Whether or not children who have accepted Christ partake of Communion is usually left to the parents’ discretion, although in some churches children are asked to refrain from partaking until they have completed a catechism or Bible Instruction Class, or reached a certain age. While the pastor usually presides, there is no biblical reason why another respected leader may not do so.

Traditionally, Communion follows the sermon as a response to the Word. Scripture, however, does not demand this practice, and other pastors prefer to have Communion precede the message in the service. Sometimes pastors leave their regular preaching series on Communion Sundays in order to bring a message tailored to this observance. To allow more time for the Lord’s Supper the message may be shorter than usual.

Communion, as simple as it is, has several different important connotations: remembering Christ’s work, spiritual nourishment, fellowship with the Lord and his people, and our anticipated reunion with Christ and the wedding supper of the Lamb. This ordinance is also referred to as ‘breaking of bread,’ and ‘the Eucharist’ (meaning ‘thanksgiving’). In any case, the Communion segment of the service may use these elements.

Song of preparation

A hymn, praise song, or special number sets the tone for Communion and, if necessary, allows the servers to take their places. Servers often process in from the rear of the auditorium and take their places in a front row or gathered before the table.

Introduction to Communion

A reminder of the purpose of the Lord’s Supper and an invitation to believers (and *only* believers) to participate whether they are from the congregation or visiting. A devotional thought may be shared at this point if the sermon has not been directly related to Communion. The texts which describe the establishment of this Supper are Matthew 26:20-30; Luke 22:14-20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-29 (cf. also 1 Corinthians 10:16-17). Beyond these, consider the scores of texts dealing with salvation through Christ Jesus. A few examples are:

Exodus 12:12-13, 21-24, 28-29 with *John 1:29* – Moses’ instructions about the Passover with John’s identification of Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Isaiah 53 – “We all, like sheep, have gone astray... and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Isaiah 55 – “Come, all you who are thirsty...”

Jeremiah 31:31-34 – The New Covenant

John 3:14-17 – “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...”

Romans 3:21-25a – “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known...”

Hebrews 4:14-16 – Jesus, our High Priest

Hebrews 12:18-29 – Since we come “to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant” let us “worship God acceptably”

Words of Warning

Traditionally, the congregation is warned against taking this meal “in an unworthy manner,” however the pastor must be careful not to imply that people must therefore come without fault. This is, after all, a meal celebrating forgiveness and life for sinners. Paul’s intention was to guard against drunken sacrilege and overt discrimination against some in the church. Nonetheless, this is a solemn and holy observance, and this biblical warning is warranted.

Удалено:

1 Corinthians 11:27-29: Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

Self-examination and Confession of Sin and Need

This may take the form of silent prayer, someone praying aloud on the congregation's behalf, or a congregational prayer. You might use, or draw from, the following texts:

Psalms 32:3-5: When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.
Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"--
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Psalms 51:1-12: Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are proved right when you speak
and justified when you judge.
Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;
you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.
Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.
Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Words of Assurance of Forgiveness

Psalms 78:38-39: Yet he was merciful;
he forgave their iniquities
and did not destroy them.
Time after time he restrained his anger
and did not stir up his full wrath.
He remembered that they were but flesh,
a passing breeze that does not return.

Psalms 103:8-14: The LORD is compassionate and gracious,

slow to anger, abounding in love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.

1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Confession of Faith *(optional)*

A biblical affirmation or an historic creed may be read at this time (see General Worship Resources).

Consecration of the Elements.

This prayer, usually by the pastor or one of the servers, recognizes the work of Christ as symbolized in the elements, gives thanks, and asks for hearts sensitive to God's Spirit during this time. Often a prayer is offered before each of the elements. Here are three optional prayers:

- Father, we are thankful for the bread and cup. We pray that these elements will provide more than physical nourishment. Grant us the peace, unity and spiritual nourishment this bread symbolizes. May this cup speak again of the blood Christ shed for the forgiveness of sin. Cleanse us and consecrate us again as we partake of this meal together. We eagerly await the day we shall eat it with you in the Kingdom of Heaven. In Christ's name, Amen.
- Our heavenly Father, in your great mercy you gave your only Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for our redemption. So we draw near in sincere humility to celebrate this memorial of his suffering and death. We earnestly ask you to make this bread and cup holy by your Word and Spirit so that in this fellowship with you our spirits may be refreshed through Jesus Christ our Lord. In his name, Amen.
- *Extemporaneous prayer:*
 - Thank God for the work of Christ through his death and resurrection.
 - Dedicate the elements to the Lord, asking him to speak to each heart in the course of the Communion.
 - Recognize the purposes of the elements

Serving and Partaking of the Elements

During the distribution of the elements, there may be silence or quiet instrumental music, singing, a solo or ensemble, Scripture reading, or testimonies. When the people have been served, the servers will return the remaining elements to the pastor at the table. The pastor will then serve the servers, after which one of them will serve the pastor(s). When all are ready to partake of the bread the pastor may hold the element in the sight of all and say:

"The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me'" (*1 Corinthians 11:23-24*).⁷

When all are ready to partake of the cup the pastor may hold the element in the sight of all and say:

"In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this

⁷ The phrase, "which is *broken* for you," is from the KJV, and not found in modern translations.

bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (*1 Corinthians 11:25-26*).

Thanksgiving

Communion may be concluded by prayer, song, and/or a special benevolent offering. You may wish to use one of more of the following Scriptures:

Micah 7:18-19 – "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression..."

Romans 5:1-2 – "Justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..."

Romans 8:31-39 – "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Hebrews 10:19-25 – "Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus..."

1 John 3:1-3 – "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!"

Revelation 5:9-13 – "And they sang a new song: 'You are worthy...'"

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ These prayers are from *The Book of Common Prayer*.⁸

For use at the beginning of Communion, or before a time of personal examination:

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

A prayer of solemn confession:

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men; We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, Which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed, By thought, word, and deed, Against thy Divine Majesty, Provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, And are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; The remembrance of them is grievous unto us; The burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; For thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, Forgive us all that is past; And grant that we may ever hereafter Serve and please thee In newness of life, To the honor and glory of thy Name; Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- ✓ Another common tradition is to invite the congregation to file forward, row by row, to receive Communion from the servers, who may say to each one, "This is Christ's body, broken for you," and "This is Christ's blood, shed for you." The pastor should explain that people may come forward in their own time, or refrain from coming at all. After most have been served, someone should carry the elements through the auditorium to serve those for whom standing and walking is difficult.
- ✓ Elements can be placed on several tables around the auditorium, with an attendant at each table. During an extended period of reflection, members of congregation go to one of the tables where they may be served by the attendant, serve themselves, or serve one another.
- ✓ Invite families to come forward together to receive the elements. The head of the household may be designated to serve. Those without families present might come as groups of close friends.
- ✓ Gather around tables in the Fellowship Hall, a tray of bread, a pitcher of grape juice and small cups on each table. Use a more informal structure for the time of fellowship and reflection.
- ✓ Communion looks forward to the wedding supper of the Lamb as surely as it looks back to the cross. Rather than somber reflection, the service should occasionally be joyful and anticipatory. Speak in the metaphors of the great feast and the wedding supper of the Lamb. You might set the table as a banquet table with silver, china, candles, flowers, etc.
- ✓ Incorporate Communion into an observance of a Passover meal. The Christian observance of the Passover (either with the full meal or just with the symbolic elements) is exceptionally rich in salvation symbolism and heightens our understanding of the Lord's Supper. Messianic Jewish believers are often called upon to lead such a service, or to provide written guidelines.

⁸ *The Book of Common Prayer* (Episcopal), (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), pp. 67, 75.

- ✓ Communion for shut-ins: Small, portable Communion sets are available from Christian retailers, allowing the pastor to share the Lord's Supper in homes or hospitals. Because Communion is meant to be celebrated by the Body of Christ, perhaps one or two other believers can join you and the shut-in.
- ✓ A healing service might be incorporated into the Communion time. One way is to have people come forward to receive the elements. Then those who would like prayer for healing of heart, relationships or body bring a slip of paper with their request to prayer teams stationed near the front of the church. No discussion or explanation is necessary; just a short prayer for them, offered in faith. Even those not seeking healing for some specific concern might delight to have a moment of personal prayer for their lives. Those not seeking prayer return to their seats after being served.

CONCERT OF PRAYER

The shaping of a prayer meeting into a Concert of Prayer began with Jonathan Edwards and other prayer leaders of the mid-eighteenth century. The word ‘concert’ does not apply to music but to harmony (as in a ‘concerted’ effort). A Concert of Prayer differs from a regular prayer meeting in that it is not focused particularly on personal concerns and it is called for the whole church, or even a group of churches. In broad strokes, Concerts of Prayer traditionally focus on two great prayer goals: the revival of the church, and the advancement or fulfillment of the Kingdom of God.

The format for a Concert of Prayer is flexible. What follows is just one basic format. A Concert of Prayer may be focused on one area of interest, (e.g., missions, a pressing community or national concern, or outreach efforts). Then these elements would be adapted to fit that situation. Careful preparation is *essential*. Make sure participants are thoroughly prepared, songs and musicians ready, time thought through, and handouts or visual aids clear. Typically, a Concert is one to two hours long.

Worship

- Songs of praise and worship
- Introduction – explain the purpose and direction; specific instructions for prayer. Ask people to stand and form a threesome (triplet). Two triplets form a ‘huddle,’ which will be used occasionally throughout the time.
- Songs of praise and worship (1 or 2)
- Praise
 - Scripture (e.g., Psalm 66:1-9; Psalm 150)
 - Prayers of praise in huddles of six
 - Song to conclude

Vision for united prayer

This may take the form of a short (10-15 minute) sermon calling for united prayer, or a simple summary of the idea and benefits of corporate prayer. It could simply be reading of Scripture with brief remarks. Possible texts:

1 Kings 8:41-43; (2 Chronicles 6:32-33) – Solomon praying that the Temple would be a place where foreigners might find their prayers answered
2 Chronicles 14-16; 20; 30:1-9; 34-35 – The stories of several revivals in Israel’s history
Psalm 80 – A plea for restoration, that God would again “make your face shine upon us”
Psalm 85 – “Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?”
Psalm 126 – The joy of being restored
Isaiah 56:1-7 – A promised house of prayer for all nations
Ezekiel 37:1-14 – The valley of dry bones and the breath of God
Zechariah 8:18-23 – People of every nation clinging to those who have the Lord’s presence
Matthew 21:12-13 – Jesus’ anger at the abuse of “the house of prayer”

Seeking clean hearts in order to ask God’s favor

- Scripture of repentance (e.g., Psalm 51, Daniel 9:1-11, 15-19)
- Prayers of repentance, first in triplets, then in silence
- Song to conclude

Seeking the fullness of Christ in his church (Revival)

- Scripture of fullness (e.g., Ephesians 1:18-23; 1 Kings 8:54-60). See other texts on revival above.
- Prayers for revival of the church
 - By leaders from microphones. One issue per person, decided by the local leader.
 - Huddles
 - Song to conclude

Seeking the fulfillment of God’s purposes (Advancement of the Kingdom)

- Scripture of fulfillment (e.g., Ephesians 1:9-10; Psalm 67)
- Prayers for advancement of the Kingdom
 - By leaders from microphones. One issue per person, decided by the local leader (perhaps only 30-60 seconds)

- Huddles
- Song to conclude

Benediction

- Pray blessing over each other in triplets, (two pray for the one for one minute, then at the signal from the leader, move to the next, etc.)
- Closing song (*e.g.*, “The Lord’s Prayer” or a song of benediction or doxology)

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ At the conclusion, ask for feedback from the congregation: What has God been saying to me/us in this prayer time? Pay special attention to repeated impressions.
- ✓ Give clear instructions at the beginning that prayers are to be brief, generally on one subject at a time, so that each one can pray. Leaders who pray should likewise be brief and focused.
- ✓ Some Scripture can be formed into a responsive reading, or a dramatic reading, to increase participation, and to help people ‘hear’ more clearly.
- ✓ Slides of songs, main themes, and Scripture readings enhance participation.
- ✓ See also “A Solemn Assembly”

A SOLEMN ASSEMBLY

The Solemn Assembly has its roots in Scripture and was first practiced in this country by the Puritans. It is similar to a Concert of Prayer in that it is not focused on personal concerns and is a prayer service to which the entire church is called. It differs in that its purpose is specifically on humbling ourselves before God, acknowledging sin and seeking a fresh anointing of the Lord.

This service requires careful preparation, first in calling of the congregation to pray, for people are not likely to come unless they have been able to see why this time is so significant. They must understand the serious nature of this meeting. It would be fitting to precede it with a time of corporate fasting.

In this service, there are many short opportunities for individual participation, which require advance notice and thought. The more people involved, the better. The tone of such a service is sober and thoughtful. The following is but one way of conducting such a service.

Call to Solemn Assembly⁹

- Songs of revival and challenge
- Scripture (read by different people)
 - *Joel 1:14; 2:12-18* – “Call a sacred assembly...”
 - *Matthew 18:19-20* – The power of two or three agreeing in prayer
- Explanation of the service:

Although God through his Word has called believers to live and minister in complete reliance upon his resurrection power, it is a constant temptation for us to rely on human strength, wisdom and resources. We forget the supernatural enabling that Christ, the Head of the church, desires to give to our decision-making, influence on others, and efforts to please him. And when we forget, we slip toward sin and foolish self-sufficiency. In addition, it is possible that some of us approach our work of Christian ministry and witness as if it were a means of gaining God’s approval, rather than a result of already being accepted through faith.

Therefore, we call all Christians to join in a solemn assembly for visible unity and extraordinary prayer to reaffirm our dependence upon God and to ask him to visit us with a spiritual awakening.

Call to thank God for his grace

- Scripture
 - *1 Timothy 1:12-17* – The mercy of God to Paul
 - *Romans 4:3-8* – God’s mercy to the one “who does not work but trusts God”
- Songs celebrating God’s grace
- Prayers of thanks (in huddles of six)
- Songs celebrating God’s grace

Call to renounce confidence in the flesh

- Scripture
 - *Philippians 3:3-11* – We “put no confidence in the flesh”
 - *2 Corinthians 3:4-6; 4:7* – Christ “has made us competent”
- Prepared prayers of renunciation (written by the pray-ers, or drawn from the writings of others; see below)
- Private, personal prayer (kneeling optional; do not rush this time)

Call to Seek God’s Guidance and Power

- Prayer for Witness
Scripture: *Acts 4:23-31* – The church’s prayer for boldness
- Prayer for Government
Scripture: *1 Timothy 2:1-8* – Paul urging prayer for those in authority
- Prayer for the Church
Scripture: *Hebrews 10:19-25* – “Let us draw near to God...”
- Prayer for Spiritual Maturing
Scripture: *Philippians 1:9-11* – Prayer for discernment
- Time of open prayer
- Closing song of God’s grace

⁹ Jerry Foote

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

✓ **Other “Calls”**

Call to Confession and Repentance

- Scripture: *2 Chronicles 29:1-11; 30:6-10* – Hezekiah purifies the Temple
- Prayers of confession for our nation, churches, and ourselves

Call to Sacrifice

- Scripture: *2 Chronicles 29:20-24* – Hezekiah’s sacrifices; *Malachi 3:1-4; 4:5-6* – Acceptable sacrifices
- Presentations of sacrifices to God in small group prayer
- Song of dedication

Call to Celebration

- Scripture: *Hebrews 13:15-16* – Offering God the sacrifice of praise; *Psalms 66:1-8* – “Come and see what God has done”
- Songs of praise

✓ **Written prayers renouncing the flesh:**

“Lord Jesus, I believe that you are able and willing to deliver me from all the care and unrest and bondage of my Christian life. I believe that you died to set me free, not only in the future, but now and here. I believe you are stronger than sin, and that you can keep me, even me, in my extreme of weakness, from falling into its snares or yielding obedience to its commands. And, Lord, I am going to trust you to keep me. I have tried keeping myself, and have failed, and failed most grievously. I am absolutely helpless. So now I will trust you. I give myself to you. I keep no reserves. Body, soul, and spirit, I present myself to you as a piece of clay, to be fashioned into anything your love and your wisdom shall choose. And now I *am* yours. I believe you do accept that which I present to you; I believe that this poor, weak, foolish heart has been taken possession of by you, and that you have even at this very moment begun to work in me to will and to do of your good pleasure. I trust you *utterly*, and I trust you *now*.” Amen.¹⁰

“Dear Father, Thank you for delivering me from life in Adam and placing me in Christ Jesus. I confess that I have been a self-er and a total failure in and of myself. I have been struggling to live the Christian life out of my own resources. I admit that I have been trying to get my needs met through people, achievements, and possessions. I now give up on myself and do hereby commit my life unconditionally into your hands. I surrender all my rights and expectations, and give you permission to make me into the kind of person you want me to be.

I believe your Word that I have been crucified with Christ, am dead to sin, buried and have been raised with Him into newness of life. I claim resurrection life as my life. I have been raised into the heavenly places and believe that I now am seated at the right hand of the Father.

I choose as an act of my will to claim Christ as my life, my power, and my identity. I thank you that my identification with Christ makes me totally acceptable, and that all my need is met by Christ Jesus. I yield myself totally to the indwelling Christ for obedience. Do with me whatever you choose. Glorify and manifest your Son in my life. In his identity, Amen.¹¹

- ✓ There are scores of other texts that may be used—throughout the prophets, the stern words of Jesus, the letters to the seven churches in Revelation, among others.
- ✓ Communion might conclude such a service.
- ✓ A sermon based on a revival-oriented text (there are several in 2 Chronicles) would be appropriate, delivered very early in the service, and not too long. Remember that the point is to pray.
- ✓ If you have two morning services, the first could be announced as a Solemn Assembly, while the second follows the usual pattern. All other adult activities during those hours would be cancelled. Since visitors generally come to the later service, they would not be caught unprepared for such a solemn service.

¹⁰ Hannah Whitall Smith, *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1952), p. 54 (language modernized).

¹¹ From Exchanged Life Ministries, 1988.

- ✓ Such a service is especially appropriate at a time of national crisis, before an election, or in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer, the first Thursday in May.
- ✓ A number of books of prayers provide thoughtful and timeless written prayers, often on particular subjects that fit well in such a service as this.

HOLIDAYS OF THE CHURCH YEAR

Non-liturgical churches typically give little attention to the traditional church year, apart from the major holy days of Christmas, Good Friday and Easter. We favor preaching series over following the lectionary. (The lectionary is a prescribed list of Scripture texts—lections—for the entire year, tied to the traditional church calendar.) Nevertheless, it is helpful to have some acquaintance with these important traditions. We can learn from them and incorporate them, at least sometimes, in our own worship. Furthermore, it is useful to be conversant in these things when we deal with people from other traditions.

Advent

- Celebrates the coming of Christ. In a manner of speaking, Christ actually has three “advents”: 1) the incarnation—his birth into the world; 2) salvation—his coming into the heart of each saved person; and 3) his coming in glory. (The second, salvation, may not be regarded by some in the same way as the first and second comings of Christ to the world in history.)
- The first Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of the traditional church year
- The four Sundays preceding Christmas, beginning with the Sunday closest to November 30
- Called *The Season of Expectation*
- Traditional color, royal blue or purple, used in banners or vestments, for example.
- The Advent Wreath, a circle of four colored candles with a fifth white candle in the middle, one candle for each Sunday, plus the fifth for Christmas Day (or Christmas Eve). There are different meanings attached to the candles, and new meanings can be assigned. It is customary to select a few appropriate verses and carols in conjunction with the lighting of each candle. Often a different family or small group of friends from the church is chosen to light the candle each week. Four options for each week are given here:
 - **Week 1:** Purple candle
 - The Hope of His Coming
 - The Prophets’ Candle
 - Hopeful Preparation
 - Hope
 - **Week 2:** Purple candle
 - The Prophecy of His Coming
 - The Bethlehem Candle
 - Joyful Expectation
 - Peace
 - **Week 3:** Purple Candle
 - The Preparation of His Coming
 - The Shepherds’ Candle
 - Sharing Joyful News
 - Joy
 - **Week 4:** Pink Candle (pink symbolizes hope)
 - The Annunciation of His Coming
 - The Angels’ Candle
 - Praising God for the Good News
 - Love
 - **Christmas Eve (or Christmas Day):** White candle (white symbolizes purity)
 - The Birth of Christ
 - The Christ Candle

Christmas Season and Epiphany

- Traditionally, this season extends from the Sunday after Christmas to the Sunday before Lent, with each of the Sundays assigned a different emphasis from the life of Christ.
- Celebrates the life of Christ, emphasizing such key truths as the signs of his Messiahship, the Sermon on the Mount, his dealings with sinners, and his healings, culminating in the Transfiguration, the last Sunday before Ash Wednesday.

- Epiphany celebrates the visit of the Magi to Christ and is always January 6, the day after “the 12 days of Christmas.” (Various eastern orthodox denominations celebrate this day as “Christmas” rather than December 25.) The second Sunday after Christmas is regarded as the Sunday of Epiphany.
- Called *The Season of Revelation*
- Traditional colors: White or green, depending on the Sunday’s emphasis

Lent

- A time of preparation for Easter during which believers symbolically separate themselves from the world and worldly habits in order to more fully submit themselves to Christ. Above all, it is a time to consider Christ’s atonement and shape our lives accordingly.
- Begins with Ash Wednesday, seven Wednesdays before Easter, and includes the six Sundays preceding Easter, culminating in Holy Week. Named after the practice of putting a smudge of ash on the forehead as a sign of mortality and penitence.

The Ash Wednesday service, which can be held at different times of the day, is a somber service reflecting on our mortality and sin, and our utter dependence on Christ’s saving grace. Traditionally, people file forward to the pastor, who applies a smudge of ashes (a mix of fine, black ash with olive oil), and says, “Remember, from dust you came and to dust you will return.” This service tends to be formed around strong liturgical elements—longer Scripture readings, written prayers and responses, and periods of silence. Communion is an optional element.

- In the third and fourth centuries, Lent was given to preparation for baptism, including praying for new converts. Baptisms were typically held on Easter. It was also a time where those temporarily excommunicated from the church did public penance in order to be restored.
- Traditionally, this has been a season where Christians give up something as a symbol of separation and a small step in mortifying the flesh. In more recent years a more positive emphasis has been on *taking on* some good discipline or service.
- Called *The Season of Penitence*
- Traditional color: Purple

Holy Week or Passion Week – *The Season of Passion*

- Palm Sunday, the last of the Lenten Sundays, celebrating Christ’s Triumphal Entry. In some traditions, the emphasis is on Jesus’ suffering or “The Way to the Cross.” Though not a traditional emphasis, this is also a wonderful time to celebrate Christ’s Second Coming, which the Triumphal Entry foreshadowed.
- Maundy Thursday derives its name from the Latin, *mandatum*, or ‘command’, referring to Jesus’ “new commandment,” after he washed the disciples’ feet, that his disciples love one another as he had loved them. A service on this evening recalls the events surrounding Jesus’ last evening with his disciples—the Last Supper, the washing of their feet, the agony of Gethsemane, and the betrayal by Judas. Of course, Jesus was celebrating the Passover with his disciples, so that is also part of the meaning of the evening.
 - Christians gathering on this evening celebrate Communion.
 - Some observe a full or partial Passover meal, with the Christ-centered meanings of the symbols made clear, and the Communion elements incorporated.
 - A time of footwashing reminds believers in a vivid and powerful way of Christ’s “new commandment” of loving service.
 - A Tenebrae Service, meaning a service of darkness or shadows, has been practiced by the church since medieval times. It begins with the auditorium illumined by seven candles on a table, similar to an Advent Wreath. A simple pattern is followed: a passage of Scripture recounting one portion of Jesus’ passion is read, a song of response is sung, one candle is extinguished, and finally a period of silence (perhaps two minutes or so). This happens seven times, with the story moving toward the burial of Christ. When the last candle is extinguished (or carried out), the auditorium should be completely darkened and there is a loud noise—the *strepitus*—(a drum, perhaps, or a heavy hammer on wood), to symbolize Christ’s death or perhaps, the tombstone rolling into place. The congregation leaves in silence, awaiting the joy of Easter morning. Communion is optional. This service may also be done on Good Friday. (Complete services can be found on the internet.)
 - Traditional colors: black or red

- Good Friday commemorates the day Christ died. It would appear our Lord died just after 3:00 p.m., having just uttered the cry of dereliction, and completed his work on the cross.
 - Though it is no longer common in our secular culture, it has long been traditional to have a three hour service, from noon to 3 p.m. A traditional theme is the seven last words of Christ (see below). Now an evening Good Friday service is more common.
 - If there has not been a Maundy Thursday Communion service, the Lord's Supper may be served on Good Friday, though that is not particularly in keeping with the crucifixion emphasis. A meditation on the death of Christ would be appropriate. Other options would be testimonies of the saving grace of Jesus, and/or dramatic renderings of the crucifixion story coupled with music.
 - Traditional colors: Black or red.
- Holy Saturday is not traditionally a time for a service, but rather for a vigil, perhaps with fasting. It is a quiet day, marked by anticipation. (In our day, some churches use this day for outreach-oriented Easter concerts, literature drops or community service.)

The Traditional Seven Last Words of Christ (King James Version)

1. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." *Luke 23:32-38*
2. "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." *Luke 23:39-43*
3. "Woman, behold your son! Behold, your mother!" *John 19:17-27*
4. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" *Matthew 27:45-46*
5. "I thirst." *John 19:28-29*
6. "It is finished." *John 19:30*
7. "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" *Luke 23:46*

Easter Season

- Easter is the pinnacle of Christian celebration. Christ's resurrection leads to our worship of a glorified and reigning Lord and to each believer's personal hope of everlasting life with Christ himself. Coupled with the truth of the cross, it gives us confidence that the power of sin, the Law, and Satan has been broken, and that the Lamb will indeed "open the seals" and bring all things under his authority.
- Commencing with Easter Sunday, Eastertide extends for eight Sundays, the seventh being Ascension Sunday and the eighth being Pentecost Sunday. (Ascension Day actually always falls on a Thursday, 40 days after Easter - Acts 1:4.) Traditionally, the Sundays following Easter focus on the continuing ministries of the risen Lord.
- Some churches begin this Easter Sunday with a sunrise service, remembering that the resurrection was discovered by Jesus' followers "very early in the morning." If the weather is conducive this is held outdoors at dawn.
- Ascension Sunday gives opportunity for worshipping Christ as our King and High Priest, seated in glory with the Father.
- Called *The Season of Celebration*
- Traditional colors: White or gold

Pentecost

Pentecost was the ancient Jewish Feast of Weeks, a thanksgiving festival for the wheat harvest (Ex. 34:22). For the Christian, Pentecost Sunday is seven weeks after Easter and is a day to celebrate God's gift of the Holy Spirit to indwell his people and his church (Acts 2).

- The *season* of Pentecost extends all the way from the Pentecost Sunday to Christ the King Sunday, which is the last Sunday before Advent, about half the year. In general, this is a time when the lectionary calls attention to matters of Christian growth and the life of the church. Pentecost Sunday is also known as Whit Sunday (White Sunday), a reference to the white robes of baptismal candidates (traditionally, Pentecost was another opportunity, besides Easter, for baptisms).
- Trinity Sunday, celebrating God in his three persons, is the first Sunday after Pentecost.
- Called *The Season of Growth*
- Traditional colors: Green, except for Pentecost Sunday itself, which is red, and Trinity Sunday, which is white.

Reformation Sunday

- In an effort to stir debate, Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg Castle Church Door on October 31, 1517. The door was a kind of bulletin board for the university. He also sent copies of his propositions to a few bishops and some friends, receiving little response at first. In time, this event became the spark that ignited the Protestant Reformation.
- The last Sunday of October marks this occasion.
- This Sunday is observed to remember not only Luther himself as a man of evangelical convictions, but his reforming ideas of faith alone, grace alone and Scripture alone. Luther's majestic hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," is often sung on this Sunday.

All Saints' Day

- In the early centuries of the church, a day to commemorate martyrs moved to a couple of different dates. In 835 A.D. Pope Gregory IV established November 1 as the day not only to remember the martyrs but "all saints".
- The Sunday following November 1 may be used to thank God for his people, making special note of those who have suffered for their faith. Other emphases might be the priesthood of all believers, great Christians of the past (or your particular church's past), remembering those from the congregation who have died in the past year, or celebrating the gifts and ministries of ordinary people in your church.
- Only very recently the *second* Sunday of November has been set aside as an "International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church." These two special occasions might be combined.
- The tradition of Halloween is a corruption of All Saints' Eve (All Hallows Eve). The ghoulish traditions of that night trace back to the occultic practices of the Celtic Druids.

DATES OF RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Year	Lent Begins	Easter	Pentecost	Advent Begins
2012	February 22	April 8	May 27	December 2
2013	February 13	March 31	May 19	December 1
2014	March 5	April 20	June 8	November 30
2015	February 18	April 5	May 24	November 29
2016	February 10	March 27	May 15	November 27
2017	March 1	April 16	June 4	December 3
2018	February 14	April 1	May 20	December 2
2019	March 6	April 21	June 9	December 1
2020	February 26	April 12	May 31	November 29
2021	February 17	April 4	May 23	November 28
2022	March 2	April 17	June 5	November 27
2023	February 22	April 9	May 28	December 3
2024	February 14	March 31	May 19	December 1
2025	March 5	April 20	June 8	November 30
2026	February 18	March 28	May 24	November 29
2027	February 10	March 28	May 16	November 28
2028	March 1	April 16	June 4	December 3
2029	February 14	April 1	May 20	December 2
2030	March 6	April 21	June 9	December 1
2031	February 26	April 13	June 1	November 30
2032	February 11	March 28	May 16	November 28
2033	March 2	April 17	June 5	November 27
2034	February 22	April 9	May 28	December 3
2035	February 7	March 25	May 13	December 2
2036	February 27	April 13	June 1	November 30
2037	February 18	April 5	May 24	November 29
2038	March 10	April 25	June 13	November 28
2039	February 23	April 10	May 29	November 27
2040	February 15	April 1	May 20	December 2