

Introduction

Have you ever attended a worship service and wondered, now why did the Pastor do that? We have. Therefore, this Guide was prepared so that everyone – from a first time visitor to the most seasoned member – could have the opportunity to gain a better understanding of why we worship the way we do. It is our hope that this Guide will help answer some questions and, as a result, deepen your appreciation of Christian worship.

The order and structure of worship used by many Christian churches today, including Drayton, is based upon our understanding of worship in the ancient church. The modern service, sometimes called the *ordo*, has four parts called: Gathering, The Word, Thanksgiving, and Sending. This Guide provides a brief, but detailed, overview of the various elements that make up each of these four parts. If you would like to learn more about worship here at Drayton, please feel free to talk to the Pastor follow the service. Thank you for choosing to worship at Drayton Avenue.

We Gather Together

The Call to Worship. The words used to "call us to worship" are scriptural, and are intended to remind us that "our worship centers in God and not in ourselves". Thus, adoration is central at the beginning of worship. Specifically, in the Call to Worship: We acknowledge God's holiness and offer our love and devotion; We praise God and affirm the good news of the divine saving activity among us; We worship precisely because of what God has done for us in Christ.



Prayer of Confession. People may misunderstand the Prayer of Confession, as though its intention were to list sins specific to individuals. This is simply not the case. In the Prayer of Confession, we trust God's mercy enough to lay before God not only those sins that may belong to us individually and personally, but also the sins and brokenness of the congregation, the church universal, and the world. We do not confess primarily our specific

acts of omission or commission, but rather the tragic brokenness of our human condition, in which, even without intending to, we are constantly running away from God and our neighbors.

The Declaration of Forgiveness. The Declaration of Forgiveness proclaims God's faithfulness. Our lives are redeemed by the saving grace of God – the Gospel in miniature. God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. The Pastor does not say we are forgiven because his or her words procure forgiveness. Indeed, the power to forgive sin does not rest within the church, or even the leaders of the church. Instead, the Pastor is declaring to all assembled the reality of the divine mercy. Forgiveness is the gospel we preach, the good news of the cross. The important principle to remember about the declaration of forgiveness is that a Pastor can declare it, but it is God that gives it. The astoundingly good news of our reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ frees our tongues to sing praise to God. During the declaration, you may also see the Pastor **pour water** from a great height from a large pitcher into the font so that it can be seen and heard by the congregation. This dramatic action is not theater; rather the display of the water is intended to remind everyone of the link between the promise of God's grace and forgiveness as recited in the Gospel and the cleansing nature of baptism.



The Peace. The Peace may occur after the Declaration of Forgiveness or later in the service. The Peace originated in the practice of the early Christians, who were accustomed to exchanging a "holy kiss" during the liturgy. In ancient traditions, it was most likely placed before the Offering or at the beginning of the Communion liturgy. The significance of its placement the prayer of confession and the declaration of forgiveness is that it completes a theme of reconciliation by moving toward the exchange of reconciling words and gestures among the people of God.

We Hear the Word



The Prayer for Illumination. Before the scriptures are read, and before a sermon is preached, we offer a Prayer for Illumination. Why? This prayer asks that the Holy Spirit open our minds and our hearts to the Word so that we may not only hear, but also understand and believe. The Holy Spirit enables us to see and hear things in the biblical texts that may have been hidden to us before. God's Word and God's Spirit always go together. Therefore, in this prayer, we acknowledge our dependence on the action of the Spirit to transfigure the language of Scripture and preaching from ordinary words into the Living Word that has the power to open hearts and minds, in order to transform God's people in heart, mind, and soul. A prayer for the Spirit's illumination is also important for biblical interpretation and for applying the Bible's word.

Scripture Readings. At services in the ancient Jewish synagogue, a series of biblical lessons were read. This practice was imitated in Christian worship from the earliest times. During Sunday worship, it is intended that there be more than one Scripture reading, and that the readings follow one another closely, interspersed with silence for reflection between Scripture passages, the singing of a psalm and, perhaps, hymns or spiritual songs.



The Sermon. However enriching it may be to use the sermon time for teaching, therapy, Bible study, or advocacy of good causes, these are not the purpose of preaching. The sermon may teach; it may prove to be therapeutic; it may offer a more profound knowledge of the biblical text; and it may stir commitment to a good cause, but these are all side effects and not the main point of preaching. The Reformed tradition believes that, through the reading and preaching of the Word is not a sacrament, it is sacramental. That is to say, by reading and preaching of the Word, Jesus Christ does indeed become present to the congregation (as opposed to a Christ whose words are simply being recalled from a historical distance) just as we believe Christ becomes present among us in the celebration of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

This presence is not ours to command, but is a gift of God by means of the Holy Spirit.

Affirmation of Faith. The faith of the church 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 to worship. For example, candidates for Baptism gave confirmed their faith by reciting the words of the Apostle's Creed, and upon their Baptism were admitted to the Eucharist. For those who are baptized, whenever we say the creed we reaffirm the profession of faith made in our baptism.

We may affirm our faith in Christ by saying a creed of the church. The Nicene Creed and the Apostle's Creed express the faith and tradition of the whole church, the faith in which we were baptized. The Nicene Creed is traditionally said whenever the Lord's Supper is celebrated.

Prayers of the People. As the Pastor leads the congregation through this point of the service you may hear him or her briefly pause between each prayer. This moment of silence is not done for dramatic effect. The pause is included to allow each member of the congregation a moment of silence to reflect on the prayer and to add his or her own silent prayer.



We Give Thanks and Respond to the Word



The Offering. (A response to God's self-offering in Christ). Reformed churches of the 1500s scheduled the "collection" at the end of the service, as the people departed. As a visual reminder of the importance of giving alms to the poor, a great chest was put at the church door to receive contributions. The money was then used by the deacons to support the church's ministry to those in distress. The alms chest was placed at the door because the church believed that the meeting with Christ at the Table was to be continued in the world where Christ awaited discovery in the guise of the neighbor in need. The weekly discipline of almsgiving ("the collection")

therefore is related to prayer. Prayer and social concern are inseparable. The *worship* of the congregation is to be reflected in the *work* of the congregation.

Prayer of Thanksgiving. Called in Latin the *Sursum Corda* (upward the hearts), this is an ancient greeting to the congregation that traditionally begins the celebration of communion. If communion is not offered on a particular Sunday, the Prayer of Thanksgiving is followed by the Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive 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.

We Go Forth in Faith

Benediction and Charge. The Benediction is not a closing prayer, but God's blessing pronounced by the minister on the people who are about to make their departure, and it also uses the words of Holy Scripture. We go out to meet joys and obligations, pleasures and troubles, secure in the shelter of God's trustworthy Word, and strong in its power. The charge is just that, a charge to go into the world in the name of Christ.



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THE ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP AT DRAYTON AVENUE



*A Guide for a Better
Understanding of the How,
and the Why of Worship*