

Worship Notes: A Brief Commentary on the Liturgy

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by Rev. Curtis Aguirre

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Introduction

Why do we do what we do in worship? Why are things lined up the way they are? Why do we decorate the church the way we do? What is the purpose of all this?

These are some of the questions I want to get at in this series of brief commentaries on the different parts of our worship and of the worship space. I hope that these little reflections can help to enhance your worship experience, or at least make liturgical worship a little more understandable.

For those coming from other congregations, these notes are built around the shape of the liturgy as it is used at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Penticton. The setting of the liturgy that we generally use is "Now the Feast" by Marty Haugen, Rev. Susan Briehl, and Rev. Daniel Erlander. However, you should find these notes helpful in understanding any liturgy that comes out of the classic liturgical worship tradition of western Christianity.

Pastor Curtis Aguirre
Epiphany Season, 2017

Part I: The Parts of the Liturgy

1. The Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness

Why do we often begin the service with this Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness? Why this? It sounds like a bit of a downer way to start the service: "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Let us confess our sins..." Why all this talk of sin?

While we often think of worship as some form of entertainment or education, it is actually an act of coming before God and bringing all of ourselves as an offering to God. That is why it is called "worship". We worship God.

So, the first step in coming before God is to be honest with ourselves and with God. We know we can't hide anything from God, but we like to hide things from ourselves. We like to make excuses for our behaviour toward other people, or our failure to act when we should. The Order of Confession makes us stop for just a moment, and be honest with ourselves, naming to ourselves what we know God already knows.

The power of this naming is crucial. There is always room for improvement, as we know from all aspects of life: in school, at work, in sports and leisure activities, in music, and in our interpersonal relationships. This is "liturgy", a word that in Greek means "work of the people." This is part of our inner work. The spiritual goal is to become "transparent", so

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to speak, so that you can say about yourself, what you see is what you get.

It happens too often that we use Christian worship to just confirm for ourselves what we already think or believe. But here is a moment when we are called on to go deeper and bare our souls, to God and to ourselves.

But we don't end it there. From a Lutheran perspective, the most important part is the last word in the title of this "Order of Confession and *Forgiveness*". The proclamation of forgiveness at the end is a reminder that we have come to worship the God who is love, the God who in Jesus gave all for us, and in whom there is forgiveness.

2. The Gathering Hymn or Opening Hymn or Processional Hymn

The purpose of our Sunday morning gathering is to worship God. Everything else that we do on Sunday morning is secondary to that. After having stripped away some of our self-delusion in the Order of Confession and Forgiveness, we engage in an act of pure worship, singing praises to God in the Gathering or Opening or Processional Hymn.

We use music because the act of singing the words means that we do not only use our brain (as we do when we just recite words) but we use our whole body: singing is a whole-body experience. Music is a special gift that God has given

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us to express our emotions and to shape our emotions. A sad song can express a sadness we already have, but it can also make us sad. An upbeat song can express the happiness we already have or it can help us be happy when we are sad.

Typically the Gathering Hymn or Opening Hymn or (if there is a processional) the Processional Hymn should be one that focuses on praising God. Some hymns are more of a teaching nature, and some for expressing various feelings, but this hymn should be one whose main purpose is to praise and worship God.

The point of worshipping God is to remind us of our relationship to God; to remind us that God IS God, and that we and our needs and wants and preferences and ideas and opinions and technologies and tribes and nations and power and wealth or whatever else it is that we tie our egos up in, are not God.

We are creatures, created by God. God is the source and the goal. The Gathering Hymn, focused on worshipping and praising God, is meant to remind us of this.

At the same time, the act of singing together also functions to build the community. Music has always been an important way that humans have bonded: again, a gift to help us function together. And so the Gathering Hymn begins the process of gathering us together into one spirit and one heart, gathered around the centre which is the God who comes to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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I say that the Gathering Hymn *begins* the process, because it takes more than one hymn to foster a sense of common purpose. Everything we do from the Brief Order of Confession to the Prayer of the Day is referred to as "the gathering rites." These are all designed to work together to help us focus our minds and hearts on the task of coming intentionally into the presence of God.

3. The Greeting

Throughout the service there are places where the worship leader greets the people with words such as, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all," or the shorter form, "The Lord be with you." And the congregation responds with the words, "And also with you."

Originally the response was, "And with your spirit," which was a poetic way of saying "And also with you." But this reply was also something of a hint at the more otherworldly emphasis of Medieval Christianity. So, in the liturgical renewal following the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, there was a desire to make the reply more direct (more "mundane" as it were) and also more parallel to the words spoken by the worship leader.

These greetings serve the same function as when I go to the microphone and say, "Good morning," and you all reply

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with "Good morning." It is a way of greeting each other, or acknowledging that we are in the room together and that there is a relationship taking place between the person in front and everyone else.

While we could just leave it at, "Hi," with everyone replying "Hi," the traditional greetings add the layer of reminding us in whose name we have gathered. So it is not just the greeting between us, but it is the greeting within the context of this gathering that is taking place with the express purpose of worshipping God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Notice that this first greeting—often called the "Apostolic Greeting"—is also a Trinitarian greeting: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (Son), the love of God (Father), and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

4. The Kyrie

"*Kyrie eleison*" ("Lord have mercy") is the oldest prayer response in the Sunday morning worship. It is reminiscent of the time when two blind men called to Jesus, "Have mercy on us, Lord!" (Matthew 20:31) or when the blind beggar Bartimaeus called out from the roadside, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:47). We call out, knowing our need for God's help.

"Lord have mercy" or "*Kyrie eleison*" was originally used as a response to prayer petitions in a type of back-and-forth prayer called a litany, where a prayer leader prays a petition

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and the congregation responds by saying or singing "*Kyrie eleison*" or "Lord have mercy", which is exactly what we do in this litany in "Now the Feast" called "Kyrie".

The ancientness of the Kyrie can be seen in the fact that even in the Latin mass, though the Kyrie was sometimes in Latin (*Miserere nostri domine*) it was normally said in Greek (*Kyrie eleison*). The first Christians in the city of Rome were immigrants from the Greek speaking eastern parts of the Roman Empire. The city of Rome in its imperial heyday was like all imperial capitals, attracting peoples from every corner of its empire: and it happened to be that in the densely populated eastern part of the Roman Empire, where Christianity came from, the legacy of Alexander the Great lived on and the Greek language functioned as the language of commerce and learning and as the common second language.

That's why the New Testament was originally written in Greek, even though Jesus probably spoke Aramaic: it was a way of reaching a wider audience. And that is why until the 200's most Christians in the city of Rome—people who had come from various parts of the Empire—did not worship in Latin but in Greek. But as always happens with immigrants, the children and grandchildren and great grandchildren gradually got away from the Greek of their ancestors and adopted the local language, which was Latin. Gradually everything was translated into Latin, but as an acknowledgement of previous generations, the Kyrie stayed in Greek. As the Christians in Rome and Italy could no longer understand Greek, the prayers of the litany fell away

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and all that remained were the phrases, "*Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison*"—"Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy" referring to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

1,600 years later, in the Lutheran Book of Worship, the Kyrie was restored to the kind of prayer it originally was: the first set of prayer petitions in the service, petitions led by a prayer leader or cantor, and responded to by the congregation with the words, "Lord, have mercy." Here in Now the Feast, the church composer Marty Haugen went a step further and made the response the full, "Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy."

So, what is it that we are doing here in the Kyrie? Let's put it into the flow of the service up to this point. First we brought ourselves in all honesty before God in the Order of Confession and Forgiveness, and tried to strip away some of our self-delusion and admit that there is room for improvement in our lives: we tried to become transparent before God. Then, after having been assured of God's love expressed to us in forgiveness, we began to sing God's praises in the Gathering Hymn, reminding ourselves that God is God, and we are not. And now, in the Kyrie, we lift up the first set of petitions in the worship, praying in the broadest terms for the Church and the world.

These prayers begin with the words, "In peace, in peace, let us pray to the Lord," because these prayers arise out of our faith in God. We can be at peace when we pray because we trust the One to whom we direct our prayers; we know that

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all things are in God's hands. "In peace, in peace, let us pray to the Lord." You can be at peace as you lift your prayers to God because the peace of God that surpasses all understanding is with us.

5. The Hymn of Praise

At this point in the service you'll notice that there is a pattern developing. The pattern is Confession and Forgiveness (petition) - Gathering Hymn (praise) - Kyrie (petition) - Hymn of Praise (praise). The Prayer of the Day, which follows the Hymn of Praise completes the pattern so we have the five part iambic pattern, petition-praise-petition-praise-petition, like Shakespeare's iambic pentameter: weak-STRONG-weak-STRONG-weak; petition-PRAISE-petition-PRAISE-petition. This is ritual poetry expressed in the structure of the liturgy.

The traditional words for the Hymn of Praise are a prayer called the Gloria:

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those of good will:
We praise you, we bless you, we worship you, we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father almighty.
Lord Jesus Christ, only begotten Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sins of

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the world, have mercy on us;

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer.

You are seated at the right hand of the Father, have
mercy on us.

For you alone are Holy, you alone are the Lord, you
alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy
Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

In the Orthodox Divine Liturgy and in the Latin Mass this hymn is always the hymn of praise, but in our tradition it is the function of it that is important rather than the specific text. And so sometimes regular praise hymns are used, or church composers, such as Marty Haugen, compose specific Hymns of Praise, such as the one we use which is "Now the Feast and Celebration."

The Goal of Marty Haugen and the two other people who helped him write the words (Rev. Susan Briehl and Rev. Daniel Erlander at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington) was to make our praise of God also an acknowledgement of what we are doing: feasting and celebrating—feasting on the Word, and celebrating the Lord's Supper. They also wanted to emphasize how all creation sings God's praises, as it says in Psalm 19, "The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork..." The verses of "Now the Feast" are taken from various parts of Revelation where heaven and earth praise God and the Lamb who was slain.

6. Prayer of the Day

The Prayer of the Day marks the end of the Gathering Rites and the transition into the Proclamation of the Word. The Prayer of the Day used to be called the Collect (with emphasis on the first syllable). It is designed to be the gathering prayer that *collects* the people and helps the people *collect* their thoughts to prepare to hear the words of Scripture. It does this by summarizing in a brief way the main theme of the day that we will encounter in the Scripture readings.

Collect prayers have a three-part structure. They begin with an address to God that says something about God, such as in the Prayer of the Day for "Day of Thanksgiving" where it says:

Almighty God our Father, your genuine goodness comes to us new every day.

You can hear at this point already that the theme for the day has something to do with God providing.

Next comes a petition. The one for "Day of Thanksgiving" goes like this:

By the work of your Spirit lead us to acknowledge your goodness, give thanks for your benefits, and serve you in willing obedience...

The theme of giving thanks is extended to include not only recognizing the abundance that God provides and giving

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thanks for it, but also to serving God, which we do by serving others.

The conclusion to a collect prayer usually affirms that we pray to God through Jesus. It also usually spells out in some way the relationship between the persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). In the prayer for Day of Thanksgiving the conclusion is a shorter type that goes like this:

...through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

This brings up another important feature of collect prayers. Collect prayers are built on the theological assumption that the most appropriate way to pray is **to** the Father, **through** the Son, **in** the Holy Spirit. In other words, Jesus taught his disciples to pray to the heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus ("in my name"), and said that the Holy Spirit would be present with them.

In this way collect prayers are the classic western Christian prayer form (by "western Christian" I mean Roman Catholic and Protestant, as opposed to "eastern Christian" which would be the Orthodox communion). In the Eastern Orthodox Churches prayers are often directed to "Christ our God" while western Christian traditions usually direct them to God the Father (Almighty God, Merciful God, etc.), though not always.

Even in the tradition of collect prayers, some are also directed to Jesus, as in the one for the 20th Sunday after Pentecost which goes like this:

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Our Lord Jesus, you have endured the doubts and foolish questions of every generation. Forgive us for trying to be judge over you, and grant us the confident faith to acknowledge you as Lord.

Notice how the third part of the structure was left off because a prayer directed **to** Jesus does not need words that say that we are praying **through** Jesus.

Excursus: The Choir

This is the point at which our choir usually sings here at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, but this placement of the choir at this point in the service is just a choice that I made in consultation with our choir director. I suggested placing the choir here because it is the natural break that happens between the Gathering Rites that we've just completed, and the Proclamation of the Word section that is just about to begin. Depending on what the emphasis of the worship service is, what the lessons for the day are, and what pieces of music the choir is presenting, the choir could sing just about anywhere in the service.

So, what are the role, the purpose, and the place of choirs in Christian worship? To answer this question, we have to go back to the very beginnings of Christianity and Christian worship.

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The earliest Christian worship was modelled on synagogue worship: hymns, prayers, readings from Scripture, commentary on the readings, more hymns and prayers. The uniquely Christian part is the second half: Holy Communion, the meal that Jesus shared with his disciples the night he was arrested—but I'll come back to that when in the section on Communion.

Synagogue worship was almost all sung, and it was sung without instruments. Musical instruments were reserved for the Temple in Jerusalem. Early Christian worship was the same: all *a capella* or unaccompanied singing, with certain people leading the singing or teaching the songs.

As Christianity spread and grew, and as worship spaces got larger and more full of people, choirs were formed to teach the songs, and to lead and support the congregations' singing.

After Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the 300's, the churches got huge, the worship became more elaborate, and choirs became larger and even more essential for leading the worship than before. They also began to sing certain special songs or hymns for the congregation.

As we move past the 900's and into the Middle Ages, a gradual split begins between eastern and western Christianity. In the east—what we would now call Eastern Orthodox Christianity—all the music remained unaccompanied singing, and to this day Orthodox worship looks and sounds a lot like it did 1,500 years ago, with the choir playing a huge role

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throughout the service. But in the west—what evolved into the Roman Catholic Church—instruments were gradually allowed into the worship. By the 1500's, when the Protestant Reformation started, pipe organs and other instruments were accompanying the congregation so the choir could begin to do more and more feature music, and the music became increasingly complex and elaborate.

In the Lutheran church, choirs continued to be both an important part of leading the worship and teaching new hymns, but also of offering special music—anthems, musical settings of the Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter stories, and later, in the 1600's and 1700's, weekly cantatas based on the lessons for the day—all presented as musical offerings to God and inspirational music to evoke praise, prayer, or thoughtful contemplation in the congregation.

And that is where we find ourselves today. In many Lutheran congregations, choirs still play an important role in leading the congregational singing, helping the congregation learn new music, and also offering special music. When our choir is missing in the summer, the singing is not as strong: it makes a big difference to have a cohesive group of practiced singers setting the tone!

7. The Lessons

Christian worship is constructed around two centres, two anchor points: the public reading of the Bible and the

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celebration of Holy Communion. Each of these anchor points is symbolized by a piece of furniture: the lectern (reading stand) or pulpit (an enclosed and elevated platform for preaching) or ambo (a reading stand also used for preaching) represents the spoken word, and the altar or table represents the shared meal. Another way to understand this is that in the worship, God is revealed to us in the words of Scripture and God is revealed to us in the Communion Meal. The flip side of this is that we are gathered around the witness of the ages coming to us through the Scriptures, and we are gathered around this ceremonial meal of God's mercy to commune with each other and with all those who have gone before, especially Jesus Christ, the true host of this meal—but more about that last part when we get to communion.

The assigned readings for each Sunday set the theme and emphasis of that day. For special days like Christmas or Easter or Trinity or Reformation, the lessons are chosen to bring out the themes of those particular festivals, but for most of the year the lessons flow along more or less continuously, with the Gospel reading functioning as the "lead" reading, or the main topic setter for the day.

In the old days there were usually only two readings, the Gospel reading and a reading from one of the epistles (the letters to congregations that make up most of the rest of the New Testament). Readings from the Old Testament were only used now and then on certain festivals or to supplement the other two readings. The Psalms were worked in more as liturgical or worship pieces than as readings or lessons. This all changed with the liturgical renewal movement in the mid-

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20th century which created the pattern we have now: Old Testament reading, Psalm, epistle reading (from the New Testament), and Gospel.

If you look at the structure of this part of the service, it is like a ladder or staircase that brings us ever closer to Christ. The Old Testament and Psalm give us God's self-revelation to Israel, in which we can see Christ hinted at between the lines. The epistle reading gives us reflections on Christ from those who had encountered or known Jesus. And finally in the Gospel reading, we hear and see our Teacher and Master speaking and acting; and so it is at this point, when Christ "walks into the room" (so to speak) that we stand to show honour to our Teacher.

Then, when the Gospel reading is done, we sit again to listen while someone appointed as the teacher to the community unpacks the Bible readings for us and reflects on their significance for living. This is called "the sermon" or "the homily". While in many Protestant traditions (including Lutheranism) the sermon became the most important part of the service, the sermon or homily is actually subsidiary to the words of Scripture: it is intended to be in service to the Scriptures to make them understandable and useful for the gathered community—but I'll say more about that in the next section.

8. The Sermon and the Hymn of the Day

The Bible readings stand at the centre of the first half of the Sunday worship, with the Gospel reading taking the place of highest honour. The sermon, then, is not its own end, but serves the purpose of bringing explanation or commentary or interpretation to those readings, as when Jesus, at the service in the synagogue, read from the book of Isaiah and then offered an interpretation of the text he had just read (Matthew 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6; Luke 4:1-13). Other words for sermon are homily, reflection, meditation, or message.

Sermon writing is both science and art. On the science side, the one preparing the sermon should, ideally, read through the lessons in their original languages, or—if the person lacks the language training—at least compare various translations of the text to get a sense of any linguistic issues. Then the person should look at the text in its larger context in the book it is from to see where the passage fits in the flow of the prophet or epistle or Gospel or whatever the book is. The sermon preparer should consider the themes brought out in the text and what they might say about faith and life. Then the sermon preparer should consider the historical and cultural context of the text, be that the late bronze age or iron age setting of many of the Old Testament books, or the Roman Empire setting of the New Testament texts, or anything in between. The point is to identify things that the modern reader might miss, or to see if there is an issue or agenda from that time that is no longer an issue and so might make the text difficult to understand or might even mislead the

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modern reader as to what is going on. That is the science part.

The art part is the actual creation of the sermon. Having done the science part, the sermon preparer should think about their own life of faith, their own struggles, and consider the issues that those in the community might be facing to see if the themes in the text have any overlap or have anything to say to those personal issues. From that point on the writing of the sermon will be a matter of skill and style, and each preacher has to find his or her own voice so as to be genuine (to be themselves) and not contrived.

But the sermon writer and preacher also needs to surrender all that they have done to God. In Lutheran theology we teach that faith comes as a gift from God. Faith is not awakened by the power of the preacher's words, but rather by the Holy Spirit using the words to speak to the heart and mind of the one who hears. From a Lutheran perspective, why some believe and others don't is a mystery, and so it is not for believers to judge those who do not, but merely to receive their own faith with gratitude and continue to proclaim Jesus to the world.

After the sermon has been delivered, the Hymn of the Day is sung as a musical meditation on the theme of the sermon. In our congregation we also have a brief time of silence between the sermon and the Hymn of the Day for the same purpose: to give everyone a chance to reflect on what has been said.

Silence and music each offer their own powerful opportunities to internalize the message. Silence does this by letting us

reflect without distraction. Music does this by activating a whole range of senses and systems in our bodies, including the mind.

9. The Creed

The Creed—or as it is called in the traditional Latin Mass, the Credo—is optional in the Lutheran liturgy. It falls into a category called a "may rubric" because the rubric or instruction at this point in the service says, "The Creed *may* be said." I usually leave the creeds out because of time and because without prior instruction and explanation they can easily be misunderstood. On the other hand, one of the creeds may be especially appropriate and useful on certain feast Sundays, such as, for example, Christ the King, because the Nicene Creed's declaration about Christ that, "he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end," reinforces the theme of the day.

The Nicene Creed, and its shorter cousin, the Apostles' Creed, began life as baptismal statements of faith. When converts to Christianity were baptized in the early centuries of the Church, they would be taught a simple formula summarizing the most essential parts of Christian teaching which they could then recite at the time of their baptism as an affirmation of their faith.

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The Apostles' Creed, whose origins are somewhat shadowy, may reflect that early form of baptismal faith statement.

The Nicene Creed is essentially an expanded form of this type of baptismal statement of faith. The Nicene Creed is more properly called the Nicaeo-Constantinopolitan Creed because it is the end result of the theological debates of the two great ecumenical councils of the 4th century: the First Council of Nicaea in 325 and the First Council of Constantinople in 381.

At the time, this creed was meant to clarify certain points of contention. In order to disseminate the information about those decisions in a time before newspapers or other mass media, and a time when most people were illiterate anyway, the teaching and reciting of this creed was ordered in all the churches during the worship time. Thus it was inserted into the worship either right before or right after the sermon—in other words, in the teaching part of the worship service.

While the creeds can be seen as doctrinal statements, in the worship they are more appropriately said as prayers of faith directed to God. In saying the words of the creeds, it is important to remember that the word "believe" is here being used in its original sense of "having faith or placing trust in." In other words, since the 1700's the word "believe" has come increasingly to mean "holding a set of ideas in your head." But before that it meant "trusting in someone or something," much as we still say to our children or our friends, "I believe in you: you can do it."

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So here too, when we say, "I believe in God the Father," or "I believe in Jesus Christ," we are not meant to be saying, "I think they exist," but rather to be saying, "I trust God the Father (who created all things) to provide," and "I trust Jesus Christ (who was born and taught and died and rose) to save," and so on.

10. The Prayers of Intercession

Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica, saying:

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

And so in our worship we return again and again to prayer, lifting up our thanks, our praise, but also our petitions to God.

The Prayers of Intercession are the main place in the worship where we lift up our petitions. Traditionally these prayers are structured to move from broadest, most general and all encompassing, to the most local and personal. So they always begin with a petition for the Church and then a petition for the world. The reason the Church is considered more broad than the world is because the Church is conceived of as stretching across all times and places, as well as the heavens, in both the physical and spiritual senses. This is an embodiment in prayer of the hope for what in Greek Paul

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beautifully expresses as *anakephalaiaosasthai ta panta en Christo*, from the passage where he writes,:

With all wisdom and insight, God has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:8b-10)

When we pray for the world we often pray for the leaders of the nations in the spirit of the passage in I Timothy that reads:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. (I Timothy 2:1-2)

The leaders of the nations play an enormous part in the stability or instability of the world, and so it is important for us to remember them, to pray that they may receive wisdom and govern with compassion.

The petitions then continue with more specific prayers responding to what is happening in the world, in our neighbourhood, or in our congregation. Because of the ever-growing awareness of how pollution and human activity are having a negative impact on the planet that God has entrusted to us, it has become normal now to remember God's creation in our prayers, and to seek God's guidance in being good stewards of that gift.

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Normally, there is also a time for silent prayer or free prayer in which the gathered assembly may offer the prayers of their hearts, especially for those who may be suffering from illness or other troubles.

The prayers generally conclude with some reference to the faithful who have gone before, be they our own parents or grandparents or other mentors in the faith, or those faithful Christians of ages past who can serve as role models or inspiring examples for our own faith. This is done in the joyful hope and expectation that one day we will be united and reunited with all of them around the great banqueting table of the Bridegroom and the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

11. Sharing the Peace of God

Paul ends his Second Letter to the Congregation in Corinth with these words:

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.
(II Corinthians 13:11-13)

Sharing the Peace of God began as the "kiss of peace." The "kiss of peace" would have looked something like the way people in France or the Eastern Mediterranean or parts of

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Eastern Europe greet each other: with a gentle embrace and a kiss on the cheek. It sounds innocuous enough from today's perspective, but in its day it was revolutionary.

The world of the early Church was a highly stratified society. Only equals greeted each other with a kiss. Slaves would never dare greet their masters in this way, nor would lower class people greet upper class people in this way. Observant Jews would never greet an unclean Gentile in this way. Strict rules also kept men and women at a social and physical distance from each other.

But among the Christians it was not so. In the spirit of Jesus' words that his disciples were to love each other as he loved them (John 13:34), and in the spirit of Paul's great declaration that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free person, male nor female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus," the kiss of peace was a powerful, symbolic action in the gatherings of the early Christians, declaring that their relationships to each other transcended those of the regular society and embodied in the world the love of God. It was also meant to be a powerful act of reconciliation among the believers—a sign that they had set aside their differences and were gathered as the one body of Christ. Its role as a uniquely Christian ritual action meant that it was tied closely to that other uniquely Christian ritual: Holy Communion.

As in so many things, the "kiss of peace" gradually lost its power and central place. By the Middle Ages in what we call the Latin Mass, it was merely a ritualized greeting carried out among those who were presiding or assisting at the altar

while the worshippers looked on. In the Reformation the Protestants largely abandoned the ritual altogether because it seemed like empty ceremony.

However, in the liturgical renewal movement that was sparked by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960's, there was a desire to reclaim the best elements of the ancient Church's worship, and so the Sharing of the Peace was revived and renewed as a time for the community of Christ to once again acknowledge their unity and their love for each other before presenting their offerings and before sharing in the holy meal.

12. The Offering and Offertory

From the beginning, the faithful worshipped God, thanked God, and sought God's favour by bringing offerings. Cain and Abel brought offerings from what they had grown in the fields or raised in the flock. (Genesis 4:3-4) Noah made a large offering of animals born on the journey when the flood had subsided. (Genesis 8:20-22) When God made the covenant with Abram, Abram was instructed to make an offering. (Genesis 15:1-21) The Mount Sinai covenant between God and the people of Israel was sealed with an offering (Exodus 24:1-8). That Law also consists to a large extent of the various kinds of offerings that the people of Israel were supposed to bring before God. Indeed, three times in the Old Testament Law God says, "You shall not appear before me empty handed." (Exodus 23:15; 34:20; Deuteronomy 16:16)

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In the Old Testament Law, the offerings were either completely burned up in the fire and in this way given to God, or they were given to the Levites to support them for their service in the Temple, or they were shared among those bringing the offering as a kind of holy meal. The emphasis in the New Testament is somewhat different because the Temple sacrifices were made unnecessary by Christ's sacrifice. (Hebrews 9:1 – 10:18)

The earliest Christian congregations brought forward their offerings of food and clothing to share with those in need (Acts 2:43-45; 4:32-37) and to support the Apostles and the local presbyters in their proclamation of the Gospel (I Corinthians 9:1-18; I Timothy 5:17-18). This was done right before the communion meal because at that point some of the bread and wine brought forward was set aside to become the elements of the bread and wine for communion.

Today we no longer operate on the barter system of those days, but rather function in a money economy. So we make our offerings in money and bring them forward to the table. At the same time, here at ORLC, the wine and bread of the communion meal are still gifts of members of our congregation shared with all.

When the offering is brought forward, we do so in a celebratory and prayerful way in the part of the liturgy called the Offertory ("As the grains of wheat" and the Offertory Prayer). We do this because our offerings are signs of our devotion to God. We do not come empty handed, but offer up to God the fruits of our labours and the results of our personal

stewardship as joyful gifts. As Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth, "Each of you must give as much as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (II Corinthians 9:7)

13. The Great Thanksgiving or Eucharistic Prayer

Having brought forward our offerings to God, we now come to The Great Thanksgiving, the grand prayer that leads us into the Holy Communion, into what in the ancient Church was called "the holy mysteries."

The Great Thanksgiving has several parts. It begins with an opening dialogue between the presider and the congregation in which the presider invites and encourages those present to come before God in praise and thanksgiving. This dialogue concludes with a declaration by the presider that it is right and fitting to give thanks and praise to God at all times.

At the end of this declaration, the presider invites the congregation to join in the hymn sung by the heavenly chorus of angels, saints, and martyrs, "Holy, holy, holy." This is the Sanctus of the Latin Mass. It begins with the words that the prophet Isaiah heard the seraphim singing before the throne of God in the vision he had when he was ministering in the Temple (Isaiah 6:1-4). These words are combined the words from Psalm 118:26, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord," which were the words that the disciples quoted when Jesus entered Jerusalem (Matthew 21:9). This

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pairing of passages in the Sanctus affirms that Christ Jesus is the One who comes from God, and that Christ Jesus is indeed the manifestation of the Holy God among us; God with us; Emmanuel.

After the Sanctus comes the Eucharistic Prayer. In its full form this is a longer prayer, led by the presider, which has five main parts:

- 1) The thanksgiving itself based loosely on the Jewish tradition of the *berakhah* prayers—the prayers that begin "Blessed are you, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who...(fill in the blank)." Jesus would have used a prayer like this when he gave thanks over the bread and the wine, and so we begin the Eucharistic Prayer in much the same way, giving thanks to God for all that God has done and provided.
- 2) The Words of Institution, that is, the words that Jesus spoke when he instituted Holy Communion, or, we could say, when he transformed the Passover into the Last Supper.
- 3) The Anamnesis, or Memorial, or Remembrance of what Jesus did.
- 4) The Epiklesis or Invocation of the Holy Spirit to come upon the elements and upon the community gathered around the table.
- 5) A prayer for the return of Christ.

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All this is drawn to a conclusion as the community prays the Lord's Prayer together. In this way the simple prayer that Jesus taught his disciples becomes our table prayer. After all the sometimes elaborate words and glorious hymns of the preceding parts, we are brought down again to the simplicity of the Our Father before we share the simple meal of bread and wine.

In the Lutheran tradition it is common to leave much of the above out and to have only the Words of Institution and the Lord's Prayer as the essential elements of this part of the service. Here at Our Redeemer Lutheran on "Green Sundays" (Sundays that are not Feasts or Festivals and therefore considered "ordinary") we use a hybrid form in which the opening dialogue prefaces this shortened version.

14. Holy Communion or The Lord's Supper

Now we come to the sacramental heart of Christian worship. Here in the simple communion meal we receive Our Lord Jesus Christ in the bread and the wine; or, to use more traditional Lutheran language: Christ becomes truly present to us in, with, and under the elements of bread and wine.

The Communion meal began as a full-fledged meal modelled on that last Passover meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. It was the feast of love. This worked well in the context of the original followers of Jesus who were all Jews by

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birth and upbringing, and so understood the protocols of Passover and Sabbath meals, namely that because in the eyes of God all are equal, therefore in a sacred meal everyone around the table is equal and all get to share equally in the food.

A problem arose as Christianity spread beyond its Jewish cradle into the larger world, especially into the Greek and Roman worlds. There, public and ritual meals were used to reinforce social hierarchy where the higher up you were in the social hierarchy of the local city, the more and the better the food you were served, and the lower down you were, the less and poorer the food you got. Moreover, slaves never ate with free people: their place was to stand and watch as the free people ate, and later to eat in the kitchen or out back among themselves—a situation reflected in Paul's criticisms of the way the congregation in Corinth was observing the Lord's Supper. (I Corinthians 11:17-26)

Thus Paul, and perhaps the other Apostles as well, instituted a simplified form of Communion in which each person receives less than a slave's portion of bread and wine to reinforce that we are all servants one of another, and ultimately we are God's servants: all are equally servants before God.

The Holy Communion is a sacrament because it is something commanded by Christ, joined with God's promises, and uses ordinary elements to communicate God's grace to us. While that is the technical definition of a sacrament, this meal is sacramental in a broader sense because in it we are meeting

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God in the ordinary, the plain, the simple. The prayers leading up to this moment can be elaborate, but in the end we come to the utter simplicity of a piece of bread and a sip of wine. Communion teaches us to look for God in the simple and ordinary, in the small and underappreciated.

We often sing during this time for two reasons: 1) It is what Jesus and the disciples did at that last Passover meal (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26), and 2) singing appropriate hymns can be a powerful way to help us focus our hearts and minds on this time of profound worship.

In the western Christian tradition, the first communion hymn is often "Lamb of God" which, in the Latin Mass, is called the *Agnus Dei*. This hymn is based on the words of John the Baptist, when he was first identifying Jesus to his own disciples saying, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) To these words are added the words from the *Kyrie* that we sang at the beginning of the worship service: "...have mercy on us." The Lamb of God or *Angus Dei* then ends with the plea, "grant us peace," which picks up on the words of Jesus at the Last Supper where he says to his disciples:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.
(John 14:27)

Excursus: Who May Receive Communion?

The few references we have in the New Testament to the earliest communion practices do not imply any kind of barrier to participation in the meal, except, of course, that those who were there would have been members or participants in the early Christian community. The communion meal was a re-appropriation by Jesus of the Passover meal: a meal at which all ages participate and share in the food. That Jewish sensibility around the role of ritual meals in bringing the entire community together would certainly have carried over into the communion practices of those earliest Christians, almost all of whom were themselves Jewish.

As we see from such examples as the household of Lydia and the household of the Roman gaoler in Acts 16, entering the Christian community was fairly simple and straightforward during the New Testament period: it required only a confession of faith and baptism, and apparently it was enough for the head of the household to initiate this in order for everyone in the household to be brought into the community through baptism as well. Again this reflects the Jewish understanding of family and tribe: that religion is not an individual matter, but shapes the life of the entire household.

After the year 70, the Christian church became much more Gentile (non-Jewish) in its demographic profile as Christianity spread to many parts of the Roman Empire and beyond, and as the Jewish Christian element declined. And yet in the oldest extant Christian worship manual that we have—a small work called the "Didache" or "Teaching" from the early

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100's—we see only this limitation to participation in communion:

No one is to eat or drink of your Eucharist but those who have been baptized in the name of the Lord...
(Didache 9)

By the 300's there was a shift in the attitude toward communion. It had come to be called "the holy mysteries" and the un-baptized were not even allowed to remain in the room when it was celebrated. Increasingly, denial of access to communion was used as a punishment for false teaching and various sins such as murder and adultery. The acts of the Seven Ecumenical Councils (from Nicaea I in 325 to Nicaea II in 787) lay out periods of exclusion from communion of months and even years, combined with mandatory penances.

At the time of the Reformation, much of this was done away with, but what remained in the Lutheran church, with its emphasis on teaching, was a delay in children receiving communion until they had completed a period of instruction and had been confirmed. This was based in part on what we now know to be a faulty reading of I Corinthians 11:29:

For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves.

Taken out of context, "discerning the body" was long believed to imply that one had to understand communion in order to receive it. However, looking at this verse in the context of

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Paul's larger discussion in I Corinthians—a discussion that is about divisions in that congregation arising for various reasons and about calling the people of that congregation to recognize that they are the body of Christ—reveals that Paul's concern is that people are also using communion to divide "the body", i.e., the church. He is not calling for the partakers of communion to understand it; rather, he is condemning those who use communion to undermine the unity of the church (see especially I Corinthians 11:17-22).

In the early 1990's, after looking back at the history of communion practices and looking again at the Biblical witness around communion, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (the denomination to which Our Redeemer Lutheran Church belongs) adopted a communion policy called, "communion of all the baptized"—a policy that echoes the teaching of the Didache.

While "communion of all the baptized" is the technical "line in the sand" of the ELCIC's communion policy, in practice this often becomes, "communion of those who seek to commune". The reason is twofold:

- 1) When people come up for communion, pastors of the ELCIC do not ask people if they are baptized;
- 2) Experience has shown that "many have eaten their way to the baptismal font." In other words, unbaptized people who come to church, perhaps seeking a place of spiritual nurture, when invited to participate in the communion with everyone else,

soon find themselves wanting to enter into the Christian community in a deeper and more committed way, asking then to be baptized. The Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways!

15. Post-Communion and Sending Rites

While the beginning of the "Mass" or Worship with Communion is fairly elaborate, and the Great Thanksgiving can also be lengthy and ornate, the rites that follow the Holy Communion are comparatively short. Generally there is a blessing or declaration connected specifically to the Communion meal ("The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ..."), then a song of thanksgiving called a Post-Communion Canticle, then a prayer of thanksgiving called the Post-Communion Prayer, and the Benediction which marks the technical end of the service. Following this there is traditionally some sort of sending phrase. In the Latin Mass this was the simple, *Ite, missa est*, which means "Go, you are sent." In modern Lutheran worship this is usually rendered, "God in peace. Serve the Lord," to which the people respond, "Thanks be to God."

In addition to this there can also be a final Hymn, though if you look in the Lutheran Book of Worship and the Now the Feast booklets you will see that a final hymn is not indicated, even as a "may rubric". However, in *With One Voice*, at the end of the communion liturgies, the instructions give a good

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sense of when a closing or sending hymn would be appropriate. The rubric says, "When there is a procession from the church, a hymn, song, or canticle may be sung." In other words, there is room for adaptation as the need arises.

The emphasis in the Post-Communion and Sending Rites is giving thanks to God. In this way they form a kind of thanksgiving bookend parallel to the Great Thanksgiving. They also close the circle from the beginning of the worship where we came before God in praise and worship, but also with confession and seeking God's forgiveness. Here, at the end, we give thanks to God for having washed away our sins, enlightened us through the Word, renewed us in the Spirit through the prayers, and fed us with Christ's body and blood. We are recharged and ready to return to our daily lives, with God's blessing, to embody God's grace to the world.

Part II: Paraments, Vestments, and Furnishings

1. The Paraments and the Colours of the Church Year

The decorative fabric hangings you see on the altar and the ambo (the lectern/pulpit) are called paraments, a shortened version of the Latin phrase *parare mensum* which means "to prepare the table" from which comes *paramentum* which means "adornment." Paraments in the early Church began life as the tablecloth that adorned the Table of the Lord, much the way we adorn our dinner tables when guests come over.

At first these adornments had no specified colours. Local congregations would simply decorate the church at various times of the year to mark or emphasize different occasions or festivals or seasons. In fits and starts a colour coding system began to emerge during the Middle Ages and into the early modern period as a way of teaching people in a context in which most people could not read and therefore relied on other visual clues to know what was going on.

The modern system of colours that is shared across so many different denominations began to take shape in the 1800's during the liturgical renewal movement of that century. Today's system is based on a few basic colour coding principles.

- 1) Green, the colour of growth and hope, is the default mode of the system. Green Sundays are "ordinary Sundays" when nothing special is going on. In the

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Church Year this is called Ordinary Time. About half the year is Ordinary Time.

2) White is associated with purity, and therefore also with holiness, and signals that it is a Feast or Festival of Christ. The obvious Feasts of Christ are Christmas, Epiphany, the Baptism of Our Lord, the Transfiguration of our Lord, Easter, and Christ the King. But there are some others that are considered Feasts of Christ by way of association, such as Holy Trinity (because Christ is one of the persons of the Trinity) or All Saints' (because it is in Christ that saints are saints), and so on.

3) Red, the colour of fire, like the tongues of fire that came to rest on the heads of the disciples on Pentecost, signals that it is a Feast of the Holy Spirit or of the Church. The main Feast of the Holy Spirit or Church is Pentecost, but most commemoration days for the Apostles are also observed as Feasts of the Church, as are commemorations for martyrs and Reformation Day.

4) The other important colours are purple and blue. Purple is associated with penance and recalls the purple robe that was placed on Jesus by the guards who mocked and scourged him before his crucifixion. At one time purple was used for both Lent and Advent because Advent had originally been a kind of mini-Lent leading up to Christmas, but gradually the colour blue—also a symbol for hope—has been substituted

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at Advent in order to emphasize the hopeful nature of that season.

5) There is only one time of the year when there are no paraments, and that is on Good Friday, when we strip the altar and other furnishings as we lay Jesus in the tomb.

Paraments, then, are a way that we adorn the worship space to mark the days and weeks of the year. They are like the nice table cloths and other decorations we put out to welcome guests to our tables. In this case, however, it is we who are the guests at Christ's table.

2. Vestments

The generic term for the robes and other accoutrements that pastors and assisting ministers wear in the worship is "vestments". There are several different kinds of vestments, but in the Lutheran church in North America, the default vestment is the alb: the simple white robe.

The word alb comes from the Latin *alba*, which means "white." The alb began life as the white baptismal garment that Christians in the ancient Church would wear when they were baptised. Everyone who came through the waters of baptism would put on one of these white robes, and it may even be that in early Christian gatherings the baptized normally attended wearing their baptismal robes.

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Whether that is the case or not, as the Church grew and spread, the wearing of the alb became gradually reserved for those who had roles in the worship, such as the bishop, presbyters, deacons, acolytes, or readers. They would also wear a stole or some other indicator to mark their offices—a practice borrowed from the wider society in which people's official positions were identified by the wearing of certain kinds of togas, robes, and stoles.

By the time of the Reformation, the vestments of the clergy had become quite elaborate and there was a move to simplify. It became common among Protestant churches for the clergy to appear in their street clothes; but as most of the clergy in the Lutheran, Reformed, and other Protestant churches were trained in the university, their street clothes were long black academic robes with special starched collars. This is the background for the black vestments that you may be familiar with if you grew up in the Lutheran church in Europe or come from a Presbyterian or Methodist background.

Another common street garment from the Reformation period and before is the cassock: a fitted black garment that is buttoned down the front. The cassock is still worn by some Roman Catholic clergy and is the norm among Orthodox clergy. Some of you may remember before the 1970's that many pastors wore a cassock over which they put a short white cape-like garment called a surplice.

In the liturgical renewal movement that began after the Second Vatican Council in the 1960's there was a desire to go

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back to the roots of Christianity and revive forms and practices that might function to create a sense ecumenism and having things in common. And so the alb was revived as the standard worship garment, not only for the clergy, but also for all those serving at the altar, including assisting ministers and acolytes. In some congregations readers will also don an alb.

The point of these robes is not to elevate the people who wear them, but to neutralize them so that the focus is not on what they are wearing but rather on the worship. When you put on a robe to serve in the worship, you set yourself aside and take on the role of worship leader or worship assistant or acolyte, or whatever the role may be. At the same time the alb is also supposed to be a reminder of baptism. As Paul puts it in his Letter to the Galatians:

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:27-28)

3. The Three Essential Pieces of Furniture (Ambo, Baptismal Font, Altar)

We are used to churches having all sorts of furniture in them: pews, special seats or benches for ministers and choirs, pulpits, lecterns, altars, side tables, and more. However, in a

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Lutheran church, only three items of furniture are essential: the ambo, the baptismal font, and the altar.

"Ambo" is the word for a stand that serves the combined function of lectern and pulpit. A lectern is for reading the Bible out loud, and a pulpit is for preaching sermons. In some churches there is one of each, and in some older churches there may even be only a large pulpit, from the days when the pastor did everything in the service. However, from a purely functional point of view, the only piece of furniture that is necessary in this regard is one from which the Bible can be read aloud and the Word proclaimed.

In Lutheran teaching we recognize two official sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are called "the means of grace," practices commanded by Christ, that use simple, every day elements to which are joined the promise of God's grace. For baptism, Jesus commanded that we should "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all" that he had commanded; and to this command he adds the promise: "And remember, I am with always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20). For the Lord's Supper Jesus commanded, "Take and eat," and "Drink from it all of you," and to these he added the promises, "this is my body," and "this is my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-23; I Corinthians 11:23-26)

And so there are two other key pieces of furniture: a baptismal font for baptisms and an altar for Holy Communion. Here at

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Our Redeemer, our baptismal font usually graces the narthex or entry area, but it is portable, so sometimes it is also in the sanctuary of the church or worship area (properly called the "nave", from the Greek word *naos* which means "ship"), especially when there is a baptism. Its usual placement in the narthex echoes the practice in some churches where the baptismal font is placed near the entrance to the sanctuary to emphasize the role of baptism as the entry point to full belonging in the Body of Christ.

The altar is usually the central focus of the church, generally elevated on a platform of some sort so that it is clearly visible to all. Christian altars began life as simple tables where the meal instituted by Jesus was re-enacted every Sunday (i.e., every resurrection day). As Christians were killed for their faith, groups of their friends would often gather at their tombs to "commune" with them by celebrating the communion meal on their sarcophagi. Later, when Christianity was legalized, people started building churches over the tombs of the martyrs and using their sarcophagi as the tables for the meals, or when a church was built, the bones of a martyr would be moved there and placed in what was quickly coming to be called an altar.

So, from a functional point of view, a Christian altar is really just a table, but centuries of having the remains of martyrs' or other later saints deposited inside them has led to the sense of it being not just a table, but an altar. The sarcophagus shape also gives it less the look of a table, and more that of an altar. Having said all that, I can assure you that there are

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no bones inside our altar, only spare candles and some of the altar cloths and paraments.

The point here is that all other items of furniture besides the ambo, baptismal font, and altar are purely for practical or aesthetic reasons, but they cannot be said to be essential.

4. On Pews, Chairs, and the Alternatives

Today it is normal for most churches to have either pews or chairs. However, originally Christian churches did not have any kind of built in seating (except for the benches in the apse of basilicas, but for this turn ahead to #6 "Floor Plans"). In later centuries before the time of the Reformation, there might be seating for the nobility who would usually have appropriate chairs brought in for them by their servants.

Standing was the normal stance for prayer and worship, and so everyone stood throughout the service. Even the bishop only sat before the worship began and possibly while delivering the sermon (in the social hierarchy of the day, lower ranking people were expected to stand in the presence of "their betters", so it was common for a teacher to sit while the students stood).

While there is some scattered evidence of pews in the late Middle Ages, it was the Reformation and Protestantism with their emphasis on preaching and teaching that brought pews—originally simple benches without backs—into the

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church. The Roman Catholic Church was slow to adopt pews, possibly because pews became associated with Protestantism. Most Orthodox churches today, with the exception of the Greek Orthodox Church, still worship in the old way, without any seating, standing throughout the worship.

Pews have had a chequered history over the last 500 years. They were intended to promote listening and learning, but this change in furniture also changed the feel of worship. As my liturgics professor, Dr. Michael Aune, often said, "architecture always wins." Once you seat everyone in neat rows, the worship becomes more static. Even if you have removed most of the ceremonial elements from the service, the whole package actually feels stiffer and more formal, because now you are expected to sit still. And in class based societies, where you sit is also important.

To pay for the pews and raise money for the church, it became common in many Protestant denominations for families to buy or rent pews, creating a sort of assigned seating based on how much a family could pay. In some places, this created the patently un-Christian situation in which there was no place for poor people to sit (or sometimes even to stand) in the services and church became the domain of "a certain class of people" who came to see and be seen. Over the course of the 1800's (some 300 years after the Reformation!) churches finally abandoned the "pay-per-pew" system and adopted the system that we now take for granted: that you simply come in and sit where you like.

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Pews also meant that decisions had to be made about when to sit and when to stand. In Lutheran churches, a variety of practices developed. In some places you stood to pray but otherwise you sat (even for singing). In other places you stood to sing and pray, and sat for the rest. Some places introduced kneeling for certain parts of the service, such as the Confession and Forgiveness, or just before Communion, or to receive Communion. The North American Lutheran worship consensus expressed in the Lutheran Book of Worship, *With One Voice*, and the more recent *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* is the result of many such traditions coming together.

Pews are not an essential part of the worship. They were a choice made at a certain time in the church's history to encourage listening and learning, but it was a choice that had unintended consequences. By the same token, chairs are an alternative that opens other possibilities, but also has other consequences. If we wanted to be historically legalistic about it and return to the ancient practices of the Church, we would remove all seating and simply stand. In the Lutheran tradition, however, we do not subscribe to legalism but rather to the understanding that we are free in the Gospel to agree in love on the ways that we will do such things.

5. Symbols and Visual Art

The archaeological record tells us that from very early on Christians decorated their worship spaces with art, usually

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scenes out of the life of Jesus or other Biblical stories. These scenes were two-dimensional pictures, either painted as wall frescoes or done as mosaics. Common scenes from the worship spaces of the first 500 years of Christianity are the Baptism of Jesus, various scenes of Jesus healing someone, and the Last Supper.

Many of the images were also symbolic, such as the picture from a sixth century baptistery done in mosaic work that shows two deer drinking from a fountain: a clear reference to Psalm 42:1 where it says, "As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my heart longs for you, O God."

As Christians died for their faith under persecution, many of these early Christian worship spaces came to be decorated with either the image of the three young men in the fiery furnace in Daniel 3:19-30 (serving as symbols for Christian martyrs) or even portraits of the martyrs themselves.

Abstract symbols also show up in this period. The earliest form of the cross symbol was as what we now call a Greek cross: a cross with four equal length arms, like the modern plus sign. Another common symbol was the chi-rho, a symbol that looks like an "x" with a long letter "p" intersecting it. This symbol is actually a monogram of the name "Christ": the "x" is the Greek letter chi which corresponds to the "ch" in Christ, and the "p" is the Greek letter rho which corresponds to the letter "r" in Christ. Sometimes this symbol is also flanked by the Greek letters alpha and omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, in reference to Revelation 22:13 where it

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says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and last, the beginning and the end."

The images and symbols from these early centuries tend to be uplifting and positive. The images of Jesus suffering and bleeding on the cross, or of terrible scenes of martyrdom, or of the punishments of hell all come considerably later—some 1,000 years later—in what we call the High and Late Middle Ages.

As to the introduction of statues into churches, the Eastern Orthodox Church stayed with two-dimensional images, but in the west, statues began to appear in churches beginning in the 800's.

At the time of the Reformation, Protestants had various responses to all the visual art (both two-dimensional and three-dimensional) that was to be found in churches at the time. At one extreme, some Protestants cleared their churches of all visual art, except perhaps a simple cross, in the spirit of the commandment that says, "You will not make yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down and worship them." (Exodus 20:4-5) At the other extreme, some Protestants, including Martin Luther, preferred to leave all the art that was not directly in conflict with their theology, on the principle that pictures of Bible stories and images of Jesus are useful tools for teaching, and their beauty can also enhance the worship experience. Despite Luther's preference to leave

whatever was not a stumbling block to faith, the history of the Lutheran church in this regard has been very mixed.

My personal inclination is to say that the creative and expressive act of making art is one of the ways we reflect our Creator, in whose image we are made, and a way that we worship our Creator by using the creative spirit that God has given us.

6. Floor Plans

The first Christians met in each other's homes. We have no way of knowing how Christians arranged themselves in the homes where they met. Perhaps they gathered in a circle. Perhaps they formed a "U" shape. What we do know is that most of the first Christians were Jews, which means that when they thought about what a meeting place should look like, the synagogue would have been the mental picture they carried in their minds. A typical synagogue of the day was a rectangular meeting space with a raised area in the front from which those leading the gathering would chant, read the scriptures, and teach. At the back of the space was a sort of foyer or lobby, but the wall separating the main space from the foyer usually had open arches so that anyone in the foyer could see and hear what was going on in the main gathering space. In those days only men gathered in the main space. The women and children would listen and watch from the lobby area.

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When Christianity was legalized in the 300's, the quickly swelling local congregations were given use of the main type of public building designed for large indoor gatherings that were found in typical cities of the Roman Empire of the day: the basilica. Basilicas were spacious rectangular buildings with a raised area at the front for people to speak from. They had a long central area flanked by rows of columns, and on either side of the rows of columns were narrower side aisles. Prior to being converted into churches, basilicas had been used as courtrooms. Typically, at the front of the basilica, the wall had a semi-circular bay in it called an apse, with built in seats for the judges and magistrates. When the basilicas of the empire were converted into churches, it was into this apse area that the altar for communion was installed. You may recognize this way of setting things up because the church has continued to build churches on the basilica model since that time.

As Christianity moved beyond the cities, out into the country, and into the cold, backward regions of northern Europe, smaller churches were built to serve smaller populations, and these were usually rectangles, like basilicas, but without the side aisles, so that, in a sense, they were a little like those early synagogues.

The most important innovations in church floor plans were the transept in Western Europe and the dome in the East. A transept is an aisle that crosses the main aisle just in front of the altar area (chancel). When you add a transept to a basilica, the floor plan of the church becomes a cross. A transept gives a church a more spacious feeling, and creates

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side chapels, which became very important for Medieval Christianity and later for the Roman Catholic Church, as spaces for special altars for various saints.

In the East, the Orthodox Church also created a cross shaped floor plan, but did so by having a large dome at the centre of the church, with short wings going off in the four cardinal directions, so that the cross had equal length sides and everyone was relatively close to the altar area.

In the 20th century many new and creative designs for churches became possible. Many larger churches today are built in a theatre design or even a gymnasium design. However, most Lutheran churches in Canada are still built on a simplified basilica design: a rectangle, with a raised area at the front from which the worship leaders speak, pray, sing, and preside at the sacraments.