

Welcome to Worship! – Frequently Asked Questions

General Questions

Is this “contemporary” or “traditional” worship? We believe that **all** worship is “contemporary” (that is, it is happening *right now*), **and** “traditional” (that is, it has familiar/ancient/cultural roots). At Grace, we follow the ancient order of “Gather-Word-Meal-Send.” We also strive to include a diversity of hymns and language that are meaningful for a broad assembly of people – and accessible for visitors. We also have a praise band that provides all the music for worship at least once per month.

How should I enter? All are welcome to “come as you are.” Many of our members enjoy time for quiet contemplation before worship begins, so we try and keep the glass doors to the sanctuary closed to provide some quiet space, and we ask that conversation in the sanctuary be kept to a minimum before and during worship. Also, please turn off cell phones.

Why so much standing? Lutherans believe that worship is participatory; we do not gather to watch worship happen, we are all involved in making worship happen. We invite the members of the assembly – as they are comfortable and/or able – to stand when they are active participants in worship (especially praying and singing). If you are uncomfortable or have difficulty standing, you are always welcome to remain seated.

Where should my kids be during worship? **With us in worship!** A relationship with Jesus Christ is nurtured when children are involved in worship. We have a nursery available if your kids are having trouble staying focused. The back 5 pews are “reserved” for families with children, as those rows are closest to the nursery. All people, regardless of age, are welcome to sit wherever they are most comfortable. Please be advised that the back few rows may be a little “noisier” than those closer to the front. Hearing assistance is available for those who have trouble hearing the service; please talk with an usher.

Does this church recognize women as pastors? Indeed, one of our pastors is a woman. Our community of Lutherans has been ordaining women for over 40 years. If you have any questions about that history, please talk with one of the pastors.

What are the worship leaders wearing? Most of the time, many of the worship leaders wear a white robe called an “alb.” This robe is meant to symbolize being “clothed in Christ” in the gift of Holy Baptism. In addition, the pastors wear a long band of cloth called a “stole.” This is a symbol of the pastoral office and is meant to remind pastors and people about the call to bear the burdens of those in need (Matthew 11:28-30). Finally, the pastor who presides at Holy Communion often wears a giant circle of cloth called a “chasuble.” This word is related to the Latin word for “house,” and the chasuble is a visible reminder that God invites and gathers **all people** into the household of God where **all people** share **one meal**.

Who can serve in worship? **Anyone!** We would love to have you help read, assist, serve, set-up, greet, usher, acolyte, and/or provide coffee fellowship. Just talk to a pastor or contact the office, and we’ll get you signed up and trained.

Why don’t the pastors do everything? One of the hallmarks of the Reformation (the movement that gave birth to the Lutheran church) was a desire for lay people to be more involved in worship – and that includes leadership. There are portions of the service that are reserved for lay people – readings, prayers of intercession, prayers before and after communion, among others. Although we have two pastors, we enjoy broad lay participation in leading us in worship.

Gathering

What’s with the water? At times – particularly on festival days or during festival seasons (especially Christmas and Easter) – the presiding minister will lead the assembly in a “thanksgiving for baptism,” which may also include sprinkling the assembly with water. We do this because baptism is one of the two “sacraments” of the church – the most radical examples of God’s amazing grace. Since baptism happens only once in a person’s life, it is important to find ways to remember that gift, and the “sprinkling rite” is one of those ways. Martin Luther traced the sign of the cross on his forehead every morning while washing his face to remember his baptism; when the water hits you, you are invited to make the sign of the cross as well.

What’s a “Kyrie”? At times, especially during solemn seasons (such as Advent and Lent), instead of a hymn of praise we often sing a setting of “*kyrie eleison, christe eleison, kyrie eleison*.” These are Greek phrases meaning “Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy.” It is a plea for mercy to the One who promises to respond with grace and life.

Word

Why so many readings? We follow the “lectionary” – a three-year cycle of texts read by Christians around the world. Each service has four readings (sometimes more!): a “first lesson,” usually drawn from the Old Testament; a Psalm; a “second lesson,” usually drawn from the letters of Paul or other readings in the New Testament; and a Gospel reading, drawn from one of the four gospels. Sometimes the Psalm is replaced by a song that relates to the themes lifted up in the readings.

Why is the Gospel sometimes read in the aisle? The central claim of our faith is that “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1). Proclaiming the Gospel text (the one most clearly about Jesus, the “Word made flesh”) from the heart of the assembly enacts this promise of the Word coming into the heart of the world.

What’s a sermon? As Lutherans, we are very committed to proclaiming “the gospel” – that is, “good news.” The sermon is an opportunity to hear the Living Word of Jesus Christ and God’s limitless grace and mercy proclaimed. A good sermon should always include a clear statement of “good news” – something that moves the listener to respond with “Thanks be to God!” If you don’t hear it, please tell the pastor that after worship – she or he would love to hear your feedback!

In the Creed, why do we say we believe in the “holy catholic church”? Isn’t this a Lutheran church? The word “catholic” (with a small “c”) simply means “universal.” Although we are not a part of the Roman Catholic Church, we very much believe that the Church of Jesus Christ is “one” Church, broken on earth but united and universal in eternity. We use the word “catholic” to suggest that we do not wish to be separate or different from our Christian siblings in other denominations, but rather strive for greater understanding and partnership in our common faith and life.

Why so many prayers? Most worship services include a long litany of “prayers of intercession.” To “intercede” is to pray “on behalf of” others—and there are a lot of needy people and places in the world for whom we pray. We pray for the church, for creation, for those who are sick or hungry, for nations and leaders, and for those who have died. Public prayer challenges us to remember to pray for *all* things, not just ourselves or those we love.

Meal

Why do we pass the peace? How many hands should I shake? The “exchange of peace” is one of the oldest traditions in the Christian church. In biblical times, it included *kissing*! A simple handshake (or hug) will do. Note that this is an important part of the worship; it is not meant as a time for chatting or doing business. We greet one another in the name of Jesus Christ before we share in his holy Meal. How many hands should you shake? As many as you can! You are encouraged to make the *first* hands you shake those of people you don’t recognize or know very well – and/or people you may have had a disagreement with. If you are worried about sharing germs, you are welcome to bring hand sanitizer with you for before and after the sharing of the peace – or, if you are very uncomfortable, you are welcome to abstain.

Why such a long prayer before we eat? The “Eucharistic Prayer” is a really long Table Grace (*eucharist* literally means “thanksgiving”). More than that, though, this prayer has many important parts. We give thanks and praise (including singing the song of the angels, “Holy, Holy, Holy!”), we remember all the things God has done for our ancestors and for us (the most important, of course, being “the night in which Jesus was betrayed”), and we beg the Holy Spirit to show up and make this Meal (and those who eat it) holy. Then we finish it all up by praying the prayer Jesus taught us to pray—the Lord’s Prayer—mostly to make sure we didn’t forget anything.

Why do we collect an offering? How much should I give? Worship is an encounter with God’s grace. The opportunity to give is gracious, because it is an opportunity to make room in our lives for God to make a home. The story of Jesus Christ is *the* story of God taking up residence in ordinary life. That includes our pocketbooks, where there is plenty of room for other gods—like greed, anxiety, debt, consumption, or addictions. God reminds us in the Meal—and the offering that prepares for it—that all that we are and have are gracious gifts from the One who wants to live with us and through us. How much should you give? As much as you think you are able. The Bible suggests 10%, but that’s between you and God.

Who is welcome at the Table? **Everyone, without exception.** Jesus Christ, present in bread and wine, welcomes and invites all people to the Table—especially children. Some may choose not to commune for a number of reasons, and we respect that choice. If you prefer not to commune, you are welcome to cross your hands over your chest and receive a blessing. If you would like your children to receive Communion instruction, please talk with one of the pastors.

How do we eat? Most of the time, we commune by “intinction”—that is, we dip. The ushers will invite you forward down the center aisle. You will receive a piece of bread, which you are invited to dip into either the (red) wine or the (white) grape juice. If you have other dietary restrictions, please let us know and we will do our best to accommodate you. When you have finished eating, you are invited to walk down the side aisle and return to your seat.