**The Service of Word**

**and**

**Holy Communion**

**A Service For The Lord's Day**

From its beginning the Christian church has called its people to meet in one place on the Lord's day to worship God. On the first day of the week they gathered to hear the Scripture read and interpreted and to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

For early Christians, the first day of the week was of special significance. On the first day of the week God began creation, calling light out of darkness. On the first day of the week the Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the grave, his ministry was validated, the powers of death were defeated, the promise of life eternal was assured. It was a day of new beginning, a day to celebrate the new covenant. The day of resurrection became known as "the Lord's Day." Each Sunday became a little Easter, giving new shape and meaning to the seven days of work and holy rest, and eventually giving shape to the church's annual calendar of Christian festivals.

The Order which follows and the texts provided as resources for worship in this section assume the primacy of worship on the Lord's Day, worship which includes both the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of Holy Communion.

**The Shape of Worship**

God calls the people to worship. God takes the initiative, bringing the church into existence, calling the people to assemble as the community of the faithful and to offer the worship that identifies them as a people of God and disciples of Christ. In these purposes of God we seek to find an appropriate order for the communal act of worship.

Although worship is a constant movement of action and response with many variables, there emerges a basic structure of four components. Through extensive liturgical studies and the recent liturgical renewal of the past generation, the shape of worship as described below has received wide ecumenical acceptance. Many details within the order reflect distinctly Reformed and Presbyterian custom.

The four basic components which give structure to the Order of Worship are:

Called to Worship

The Word Proclaimed

The Great Thanksgiving

The Dismissal

**Called to Worship**

The people assemble in one place to worship God. Through **sentences from Scripture, hymns** and **prayers of praise**, the community is called to unite in worship before God.

In Reformed traditions, the opening part of the service has included a **prayer of confession of sin** and an **absolution** or **assurance of pardon. The Peace**, or other sign of reconciliation, is placed here so that the acts of penitence may be completed by an act of unity and forgiveness in Christ. When all elements of confession, forgiveness and reconciliation are present, the whole is called a **Rite of Reconciliation**.

In some Christian churches, the penitential rites are placed as a response to God's judging-saving Word proclaimed in the reading and interpreting of Scripture. In that case the Rite of Reconciliation follows the sermon and precedes the Lord's Supper. Although not common in Presbyterian Churches, this would be appropriate during Lent or on other penitential occasions.

There should never be more than one **Rite of Reconciliation** in each service.

**The Peace** has been used in other parts of the service and may be used before the people come to the Lord's Table or following the Communion.Whenever it is used, it should be placed in the service so that it clearly demonstrates one of its purposes as a sign of reconciliation with others and God through Christ, as a sign of forgiveness and acceptance of others, and as an anticipation of the feast in the kingdom of God of which the Lord's Supper has been a foretaste.

**The Word Proclaimed**

The living Word is proclaimed through the reading of the Scriptures and the preaching of the gospel. A Prayer of Illumination led by the minister or first reader, may precede the readings and need not be repeated before the sermon. It is not essential here if there has been an invocation of the Spirit in the opening prayers.

**Readings from Scripture**

Readings from both the Old Testament, and the New Testament, ensure that the completeness of God's work of creation and redemption in history is proclaimed.

**The Psalm** for the day is an appropriate response to the reading from the Old Testament, or at times may be the major reading from the Old Testament. The singing or reading of the Psalms by the congregation is to be encouraged.

Words of introduction and response to the reading of each lesson should be brief and non-directive in order to move directly into the reading and focus on each one in turn. The people may respond to each by saying or singing a brief acclamation of praise and gratitude to God.

The use of a lectionary is recommended but it is not intended to be a rigid rule. When the *Common Lectionary* is used, its organization should be noted. From Advent to Pentecost and Trinity Sunday, with the exception of a few Sundays after Epiphany, all lessons relate thematically to the Gospel lesson as the story of incarnation and salvation through Christ unfolds. However, the lessons between Trinity Sunday and Christ the King are not intended to relate thematically to one another on any one Sunday. The Gospel, Epistle and Hebrew Scripture are set up in three streams of semi-continuous readings and should not be forced into a false relationship.

**The Sermon**

Rooted in Scripture, faithful preaching confronts the people with the judging-saving Word and bears witness to God's continuing activity in the church and the world. Sound preaching has long been a strong tradition in Reformed churches and should not be diminished.

**Response to the Word**

Having been nurtured, convicted, challenged or supported by the proclamation of the Word, the people respond through song, confession of faith and prayer. A **creed** of the church may be said in unison. Depending on the occasion it may be an ecumenical creed, a statement of faith from Scripture or other approved source such as *Living Faith*.  **Prayers of the people** may be offered, both intercessions and thanksgivings. The work of the people in the church is not only to give praise to God but also to pray for the church, the world and people in need. The **Sacrament of Baptism** or an ordinance of the church may be celebrated as a part of the response. This would be an appropriate place for the ordination of elders or installation of officers.

For a more detailed description of this part of the service see *Word and Sacraments*, pp. 46-50.

**The Great Thanksgiving**

The living Word speaks through sign, symbol and action at the Lord's Table, the people responding with prayers of thanksgiving for the saving work of God. Although most Presbyterians do not celebrate the sacrament weekly, the occasions are becoming more frequent and often relate to the festivals of the Christian year. A Service of Word and Sacrament is still considered to be the norm and gives shape to this third part of the service.

When the Lord's Supper is not celebrated, the alternate texts are used, but the general order of invitation, offering and prayer of thanksgiving is followed.

The basic order for Holy Communion is the fourfold action established by Christ and his followers in the early church who took bread, gave thanks to God, broke the bread and gave it to those present.

**Words of Institution**

In Reformed churches it has been traditional to read as a Biblical warrant for the sacrament the **Institution Narrative** as recorded by the Apostle Paul in I Cor. 11:23-26. This was important when the Reformers were trying to establish the idea that the two sacraments instituted by Christ were sufficient. In these days, when the dominical authority for the Lord's Supper is not in dispute, a warrant is no longer essential. The words of institution may be omitted as a warrant or combined with the **invitation.** It is most common in ecumenical circles to include the words of institution in **The** **Great Prayer of Thanksgiving**. It is common in Presbyterian Churches to say them at the time of the **breaking of bread** and this is also acceptable. Care should be taken to avoid unnecessary repetition of the words of institution in one service.

**The Invitation**

The invitation comes from Christ who is the only host at his table. Through baptism we are incorporated into the church, the body of Christ. Though we are baptized but once, the Lord's Supper is a recurring renewal of God's gracious promises to us in Christ, and the gift of faith which was confessed and sealed at our baptism. The dominant note to be heard in the invitation is that we, through no right of our own, have been invited by Christ to feast in his presence at his table. This is the kind of invitation that a child can hear and understand.

**Presentation of Gifts**

The meal and table are prepared as the people present their gifts of bread, wine and money. These material signs of creation, life and labour are returned to the God who gave them and they are to be used to unite us to the Lord of Life and to one another. This idea may be well expressed by asking members of the congregation who are not elders to bring forward the gifts of bread and wine.

In preparing the bread and wine, do not overlook the symbolic and visual impact of one loaf and one cup. Even when individual cups are used, pouring the wine from a flagon to the common chalice recalls the pouring out of Christ for the world.

The collection and the presentation of the gifts may proceed accompanied by a hymn, canticle or doxology. The minister and assistants prepare the table as the bread and wine and other vessels are brought forward. (Or the bread and wine may be uncovered if already on the table.) There is no need for a special offertory prayer or dedication at this point in the liturgy. When the table has been prepared, The minister and people proceed to The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving. The people who are able stand for the prayer.

**The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving**

The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving or Eucharistic Prayer is rooted in Jewish table blessings which Jesus used with his disciples. These prayers were a thankful recital of the saving acts of God in history. The prayer moves through the story of salvation from creation to the redeeming work of Christ to the anticipation of the fulfilment of the reign of God in heaven and earth. It is appropriate for the institution narrative to be included here. The thanksgiving for the Holy Spirit is followed by an invocation that the Spirit will move in and over the sacramental feast. The prayer is trinitarian in shape but is addressed to the first person of the Trinity.

The Eucharistic Prayer has taken shape over the centuries and its several components are generally accepted, although many details have formed and been reformed according to the changing theological and liturgical developments in the church. The pattern may be described briefly as follows:

**The Opening Dialogue** and the **Sursum Corda** (Lift up your   
hearts . . . . ) are among the earliest of Christian texts and introduce the prayer.

**The Preface** is a general thanksgiving to God for creation and the many acts of saving grace throughout all ages including the story of Israel, the prophets and the life of Jesus. This part of the prayer often recalls a special event that is celebrated on that day or season.

**The Sanctus**and**Benedictus** (The "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord" and "Blessed is he") join the praise of the people with the song of angels and the faithful of all ages who sing this ancient hymn.

**The Anamnesis** is a special prayer of remembrance and thanksgiving for the life of Christ, proclaiming his incarnation, death, resurrection and living presence. This part of the prayer often includes the **institution narrative**.

An **Acclamation of faith**, said or sung by the people often summarizes this part of the prayer.

In the **Epiclesis**, we give thanks to God for the gift of the Holy Spirit and we return to God the gifts of bread and wine, our lives and our work. We invoke the presence and action of the Holy Spirit among us and over the symbols of creation, praying that the life-giving Spirit will renew in us and the church all the benefits of the sacrament -- uniting us in the church and to Christ as the body of Christ, empowering us to be Christ's agents in the world, redeeming us and all creation until the reign of God is fulfilled. This part of the prayer may include the offering of ourselves (**oblation**) as a worthy sacrifice of praise to our creator.

The prayer concludes with a **doxology**, the people's **Amen** and is followed by the Lord's Prayer.

See page 79 for an outline of the prayer which may be copied for use by the congregation.

There has been considerable discussion about the form of the epiclesis. Should the prayer request the action of the Spirit on the people, the bread and wine, or both, and for what purpose? The prayers which follow vary a little in this respect. Most include a double epiclesis, praying for the movement of the Spirit on both the community of worshippers and the bread and wine.

The classical prayers of the church have changed in the past and will no doubt be adapted in the future. The prayers contained in this book are offered with the confident expectation that, regardless of variations in the words, God will be present in the sacrament to fulfil the purpose of this holy meal. They are offered with the conviction that the church must continue to examine and reform the liturgy which does so much to shape the theology of the church. It is true also that continuing theological reflection is necessary in order to give shape to the liturgy.

The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving is led from behind the table, the minister facing the people. The people may stand for this prayer, joining in the opening dialogue, the hymn or Sanctus, the acclamations, the Amen and the Lord's Prayer. Assuming the people are in an attentive mode with eyes open, the presiding minister may pray with hands and arms uplifted in the biblical gesture for prayer (*orans*). The presider's hands may be folded in a comfortable position during the responses of the people.

The Great Prayers of Thanksgiving provided in this book are both traditional and new. They follow the classical pattern described above. Although attempts may be made to vary or abbreviate them, the integrity of the whole prayer should be guarded. The sources of each prayer are given below to provide some sense of the long tradition of forming and reforming the text.

**The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving 1**

This prayer is from *Word and Sacraments* and was adapted from *The Service for the Lord's Day, SLR 1*, The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The version suggests that both the natural creation and human order are to be one in Christ, redeemed in Christ. The preface may be adapted according to the day or season.

**Great Prayer of Thanksgiving 2**

This is the Eucharistic prayer from the *Book of Common Order*, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1964, and is revised for contemporary use.

**The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving 3**

was omitted online due to copyright see page 547.

**The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving 4**

This prayer was prepared for this resource.

**The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving 5**

was omitted online due to copyright see page 547.

**The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving 6**

was omitted online due to copyright see page 547.

**The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving 7**

was omitted online due to copyright see page 547.

**The Lord's Prayer**

It is most appropriate to say the Lord's Prayer at this point in the service. Its petition for daily bread reminds us of the daily need to be renewed in the body of Christ. Its petition for the coming of the kingdom reminds us that the Holy Communion looks forward to the fulfilment of the reign of God as well as remembering the work of Christ.

In most instances, the words for the Lord's Prayer provided in this book are the contemporary translation approved by the English Language Liturgical Consultation, 1988. Congregations can learn the words easily if they are printed and used frequently. Congregations which prefer to use the traditional words may wish to use the contemporary words occasionally, especially for the benefit of children, youth and those who are learning English as adults.

The **Breaking of Bread** and the **Pouring of Wine** *(Fraction)* is a continuous action. Clearly visible to all the people, the action should be executed with dignity, reverence and quiet joy in an unhurried manner. The fraction may proceed in silence or be accompanied by words of Scripture such as the Institution Narrative from I Cor.11:23-25 or other passages such as I Corinthians 10:16-17 or Mark 14:22, 23. The visual and symbolic power of a single loaf of bread and one chalice of wine should be experienced frequently.

**The Distribution**

Normally, the minister and those who will assist as servers prepare themselves by receiving the bread and wine before offering it to the people. The actual manner of distribution may vary. The people may be served in the pews. The people may form a circle around the table, passing the bread and wine among themselves. They may come forward in a moving line to receive from one who serves the bread and one who serves the cup, whether drinking from a common cup

or dipping the bread into the wine of the cup (*intincture*). Or, as the Scottish church once did, a long table may be used to allow people to come forward and sit at the table. Some variety is desirable, especially if the methods used contribute to a greater sense of community and sharing of one purpose. Congregations which encourage the people to come to the table will realize that people can move themselves more efficiently than utensils can be served to them. A more complete discussion of this subject is given in *Word and Sacraments*, pp. 56-60. The distribution may be in silence, accompanied by instrumental or choral music, or the singing of hymns.

**A Post Communion Prayer**

A brief thanksgiving for the meal and a prayer for the people as they return to their work in the world may be offered. It frequently includes a thanksgiving for the communion of saints and our inheritance from the faithful departed.

**The Dismissal**

The dismissal is brief and direct, preparing the people to return to daily life. There may be a **hymn** during which time the offerings of money and the table utensils with the remaining bread and wine may be carried out in procession. A **charge**, based on Scripture and challenging the people to Christian discipleship followed by a  **benediction** or blessing of the people sends them forth. A **postlude** should continue the outward movement, being the kind of music that encourages the people to leave and return to normal activity.

The **Amens** belong to the people, whether said aloud or sung. There are several ways in which the leader of worship can encourage and facilitate this. The concluding phrase or doxological statement should be used consistently in the same form in order that the people may respond in unison and without hesitation. Choirs should see as a part of their leadership, prompt and clear participation, leading the people in spoken responses as well as congregational singing. When people stand during all or most of the prayers, they are able better to speak with a full voice. Standing is a gesture of attentive respect.

**The Service of Word and Holy Communion**

**An Outline**

**Called to Worship**

The Gathering

Musical Prelude

Processional and Presentation of Scriptures

Greeting and Call to Worship

Prayer of Adoration

Rite of Reconciliation

Hymn

**The Word Proclaimed**

**Prayer for Illumination** **OR**

Old Testament

Psalm

Epistle and response

The Gospel and response

The Sermon

Creed or Affirmation of Faith

Prayers of the People

Hymn

**The Great Thanksgiving A Thanksgiving**

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Presentation of Gifts

Preparation of the Table Invitation

The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving Presentation of Gifts

The Lord's Prayer Prayer of Thanksgiving

The Breaking of Bread The Lord's Prayer

The Communion

**The Dismissal**

Hymn

Charge to People

Benediction