

What Happens and Why in a Service of Worship

The purpose of worship is to give “worth” to God.

Our worship follows the pattern of Christian worship throughout the ages. It is a mix of hymns (songs), prayers, readings and a sermon. That pattern is not haphazard. We might say that it is divided into three large blocs:

The Gathering of the People of God.

The Ministry of the Word.

The Sending out of the People of God.

(i). The Gathering of the People of God.

- The service begins with **a call to worship**: (we recognize that we are setting aside a particular time and place to be with other people who are seeking to respond to the call of God on our lives). (Psalm 95).
- We sing a **hymn of praise to God** in response to that call. We are acknowledging that the initiative for gathering together comes from outside of ourselves: we are called into the presence of God the creator). (Psalm 145).
- That hymn of praise is followed by **a prayer of approach or a prayer of adoration**. Our prayer is designed to ‘describe’ the kind of God we are seeking to worship. It is a prayer which recognizes that we are “creatures” and we are seeking to give praise and thanks to the One in whom we live, move and have our being”. (Acts 17:28).
- We are, in a sense, acting out an encounter with God. The acknowledgement of God now gives way to a recognition of who we are as human beings “in the sight of God”. (Psalm 139). We now make **a prayer of confession**: in a variety of ways we have failed to love God with all our heart, soul and mind; we have not loved our neighbour as ourselves; we have not cared for God’s good creation.
- The person leading the service of worship will then make a declaration of forgiveness, or an **assurance of pardon**. At the heart of the Christian faith lies

the experience / belief in the forgiveness of our sins which has been made possible through Christ's life, death and resurrection.

(ii). The Ministry of the Word.

- We are now ready to listen to the Word of God. For us the Word of God is to be discerned with **readings from the Bible** (usually from both the Old and New Testaments). The Christian faith assumes that the Bible is designed to bear witness to the life of Jesus Christ and its purpose within the will of God for us.
- It is a common practice for there now to be a hymn. There are two ways in which we can 'hear' the Bible. The first is through simply listening to what is read and becoming familiar with the story line. That is an 'external hearing'. There is also an 'internal' hearing where we may hear how this reading "speaks" to us and the situation in which we find ourselves. **The hymn is an invitation to the Holy Spirit to help us hear what the Bible is saying to us.**
- The preacher for the day will usually lead a short prayer before delivering the **sermon**. That prayer is a request for the preacher's words and the congregation's listening to hear the Word of God in the midst of the words spoken. The sermon seeks to interpret the Biblical readings and apply them to our lives in the world today.
- The sermon can be followed by **a time of quiet reflection and/or a hymn** which draws together the themes of the sermon.

(iii) The Sending Out of the People of God.

- The transition to the 'sending out' of the people is made by way of the **offering**. At face value it looks like simply a collection of money for the upkeep of the church and its ministry. And, at one level, it does that. But, at another level, our financial gifts are a token, a symbol of our whole selves. We are making a response to the ministry of the Word, of God's reconciling work towards us in and through Christ Jesus.

- The offering then makes way for the **prayer for others** (sometimes called the prayers of the people or intercessory prayer). The momentum of the service is turning towards the life of the world beyond the worshipping community. Our prayers are made up of petitions or concerns for the trouble spots of the world, for places suffering from natural disaster, for our country and its well-being, for the church (both local and beyond), for the neighbourhoods and societies in which we find ourselves, for our friends and family, and for ourselves. We identify what is most on our hearts and minds and bring those concerns to God. The prayer for others often ends in the saying of the **Lord's Prayer** together. (see, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord%27s_Prayer)
- Following the Lord's Prayer there is a **final hymn** (which brings together the themes of the service and prepares the congregation for their leaving of this time of worship). It often leads into a brief **word of mission** (which is like an encouragement for the people to live out the themes of the service in the course of the coming week). There is then a **benediction** (which is a blessing made in the name of God the Father/Mother, Creator; Christ the Son: and the Holy Spirit). The service will often end with the singing of a three-fold "**Amen**" (the word means, "so be it"). (see, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amen>)



On the first Sunday of the month we will include the celebration of **Holy Communion**.

On some occasions we also include an act of **Baptism** when a baby or child is welcomed into the life of the Christian faith.