

## **Book of Worship – United Church of Christ**

*NOTE: The following excerpts are taken from the Book of Worship – United Church of Christ. They are provided to the people of the Richfield United Church of Christ in order to enrich our understanding of Sunday Worship and the order of prayer that we use. Shared according to the terms of copyright ©2006 & ©1986*

### **Introduction**

#### **CHRISTIAN WORSHIP**

What is Christian worship? The answers to that question reflect the rich diversity of Christ's church and account for more than a few of its divisions. There is no definition that exhausts the scope of the question. Every answer raises more questions and cautions humility in the presence of all that is holy. Where definitions are elusive, descriptions become an alternative.

Christian worship cannot be understood apart from the Jewish worship that first cradled and nurtured it. Like worship in Judaism, Christian worship is the glad response of total individuals—through “heart, soul, strength, and mind”—to the saving acts of God in history.<sup>1</sup> It is the communal and personal celebration in the universal church of God's love for creation and for every human being. This divine love revealed in God's gracious covenant with the people of Israel and in God's coming into the world in Jesus Christ.

Christian worship is more than a passive response to God's revelation. It is in itself a Pentecostal proclamation. It both announces the good news of God's love for all the world and invites all people to share God's saving embrace. This active response would not be possible without the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who endows the community of faith and individual Christians with the gifts that are necessary for God's service. All that Christians are and do, corporately and individually, is worship, liturgy, the work of praise and thanksgiving.<sup>2</sup> The words and acts commonly called worship cannot rightly be separated from Christians' faithful response to God in words and acts of love and justice for all people.<sup>3</sup> That is the transparent meaning of Jesus' liberating command: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>4</sup>

#### **BIBLICAL HERITAGE**

Christian worship, because it is the active response to God's loving initiative, is rooted in the biblical witness to God's saving deeds in history.<sup>5</sup> From the saga of Adam and Eve to John's mystical vision of a new heaven and a new earth, the Bible tells the story of God's redeeming love. Holy Scripture provides the trustworthy and normative record of the history of salvation. Its luminous pages inspire, inform, and instruct the church's worship through all the centuries.

It is clear in the New Testament that Jesus Christ cherished and shared in the three fountains of Jewish spiritual nurture that flowed from the Old Testament and shaped the worship of the early church: the temple, the synagogue, and the Jewish home. Each provided distinctive but complementary contributions to the full worship life of faithful Jews.<sup>6</sup> Although Jesus occasionally criticized the abuse of customs and ceremonies practiced in these places, Jesus honored them with his presence, prayer, and preaching.<sup>7</sup> At

the Last Supper, Jesus' very choice of words indicated that he knew and willingly used the prayers and blessings familiar to the people of his time.<sup>8</sup>

After the resurrection, Christians, at first, continued to participate in the worship at the temple and the synagogue and to observe the set hours of daily prayer, certain fasts, and other acts of domestic Jewish piety. When resistance to the Christian movement made association with the temple and the synagogue untenable, Christians opened their own homes as places for the church to gather.

Within the New Testament itself, there is evidence of the gradual coming together of customs and ceremonies formerly celebrated separately in the temple, synagogue, and Jewish home. Christians assembled in homes on Sunday, the weekly commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There they participated in worship, incorporating both a scripture service and a meal that included bread and wine.

Worship in word and sacrament, celebrated weekly on the little Easter that Sunday quickly became, emerged in a primitive pattern that has shaped Christian liturgy to the present day.<sup>9</sup> This Book of Worship seeks to be faithful to this heritage and crowns every service of the church with the abundant witness of scripture.

## **ECUMENICAL HISTORY**

Ecumenism is the vocation of separated Christians to celebrate their unity in Jesus Christ and to make that unity more visible as the Holy spirit guides the church into all truth. It is a vocation as old as the church itself. Within the New Testament, Christians of differing points of view struggled to live in harmony in the one Body of Christ. The Council of Jerusalem is evidence enough that Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians labored patiently to affirm diversity that did not compromise the identity and unity of the church as one people of God.<sup>10</sup>

Current understanding of the worship of the New Testament church is assisted by insights made available from the literature of the church of the first four centuries. The discovery in modern times of much of this literature, particularly the Didache, the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, and the journal of Egeria, provides texts more ancient than those available to the Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century.<sup>11</sup> This informative literature, when studied in relation to the New Testament, leads to fuller appreciation of the trials and treasures of Christian worship in the formative centuries of the church, better understanding of the liturgical development of the medieval period, and the discernment of the broad shape that gives Christian worship its enduring identity.<sup>12</sup>

Ironically, many insights into the worship that united the early church have developed as a consequence of disputes that threatened Christian unity. Were it not for the impassioned concern of Hippolytus to interpret his beliefs to those who disagreed with him, there would be no detailed description of Christian worship in A.D. 215.<sup>13</sup>

In a similar way, modern Christians are the beneficiaries of other information because one part of the church tried on occasion to force its form of worship on some minority, only to discover that uninvited ecumenical contact of this kind rarely left the majority unchanged!<sup>14</sup> The sixteenth century Reformation provides a wealth of evidence that the various Protestant reformers and their Roman Catholic colleagues did not permit fragmentation of the church to isolate them from one another. The extent to which they maintained ecumenical dialogue as they led their respective movements puts their zealous followers of later generations to shame. Nowhere does their devotion to ecumenical faithfulness show itself more profoundly than in their common concern for the right worship of God.<sup>15</sup> The confessional liturgies developed during this time are full of ecumenical affinities.

More recently, a liturgical renewal movement has arisen that is so thoroughly ecumenical that the strands of its history are difficult to trace.<sup>16</sup> Protestants rejoice to find in Roman Catholicism a renewed emphasis on the place of preaching and full congregational participation in worship. Roman Catholics celebrate the renewed interest of Protestants in the sacrament of Holy Communion and in the power of liturgical symbols.

This renewed appreciation for the unitive wholeness of word and sacrament promises to correct what Karl Barth defined as torso worship. After criticizing Roman Catholics for sacramental worship that lacks responsible preaching and Protestants for sermon services that lack the sacraments, he remarked, “Both types of service are impossible.”<sup>17</sup> He cautioned that in Sunday worship the preaching and hearing of the sermon are compromised when the opportunity to participate in Holy Communion is denied. In a similar way, faithful sharing in the sacrament is compromised when the preaching of the word is omitted or diminished in its importance.

Although John Calvin spoke eloquently of the place of the sermon, as did Luther and other reformers of the sixteenth century, he resisted every attempt to drive a wedge between word and sacrament. He boldly asserted that the sermon is itself sacramental in the sense that it is the verbal articulation of the same Word met in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Nonetheless, one does not displace the other. An order for word and sacrament remains normative for Sunday worship.

This conviction has been reaffirmed recently by Christians of diverse traditions who see word and sacrament as a unitive whole. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry states: “Since the anamnesis [recalling, remembering] of Christ is the very content of the preached word as it is of the Eucharistic meal, each reinforces the other. The celebration of the Eucharist properly includes the proclamation of the word.”<sup>18</sup>

In addition to this convergence, from the rich worship life of the Eastern Orthodox churches, Protestants and Roman Catholics are learning how to stand in awe of the mystery of God and how to resist the scholasticism that reduces an individual to intellect alone. Everywhere, Christians moved by the Holy Spirit remind the churches of the charismatic treasury of gifts among the people of God.

In 1963 the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches reported that “there is in the New Testament a greater variety of forms and expressions of worship than in the majority of divided churches and traditions today.”<sup>19</sup> Since that time, the churches, often acting ecumenically, have experienced growth in their liturgical life that reflects the closeness of their ecumenical relationships. They have discovered the richness of an enlarged diversity within themselves that makes each of them more truly universal and sets aside many of the confining stereotypes of the past. There are responsible voices currently saying for the first time that “the liturgies now in use in the separated churches are no longer a cause of division. Such causes lie elsewhere.”<sup>20</sup>

## **THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

The youthfulness of a church born in 1957 might suggest to some that it has not yet had adequate opportunity to accumulate what purists call history. It has! Behind its recent past stand the distinguished histories of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches. Through these churches, roots are deep in the reform movements of the American frontier and the Swiss, German, and English Reformations and also penetrate beyond the sixteenth century to the Latin Church of the West and to the early church that once knew a remarkable degree of unity throughout the Roman Empire. In matters of worship, and all other matters, the United Church of Christ is the inheritor of this history with all its splendor and shame and is responsible for appropriating now the great lessons this history is able to teach.

Religious history in the United States of America affirms that the United Church of Christ is a church of European origins. It is also a church of Black, American Indian, Hispanic, Oriental, and other people who share one diverse household of faith that makes the United Church of Christ a humble microcosm of the church throughout the world. It is also a church of women and men, ordained people and lay people, single people and married people, children and youth and adults, rich and poor, people with few disabling conditions and those with more. The United Church of Christ is local churches, associations, conferences, instrumentalities, and the General Synod.

At the same time, the United Church of Christ claims its place in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church of Jesus Christ which is the home of all Christians. It strives to participate responsibly in the ecumenical movement.

The United Church of Christ is not only these things. It is also becoming. The clock and the calendar announce that the United Church of Christ is making history. Part of that unfolding history is represented in this Book of Worship, requested by the Eleventh General Synod in 1977 for use in the United Church of Christ. This endeavor has looked thankfully to the traditions of the churches that presently constitute the United Church of Christ. In the preparation of the Book of Worship, earlier service books of these churches, along with documents that represent the Puritan and free church traditions, were carefully studied.

Like the venerable publications used in its preparation and in words borrowed from three of them, this Book of Worship seeks to “conserve the best in the tradition of worship” found in the denomination’s past and to “draw upon the treasures of the historic and universal church.”<sup>21</sup> It is “offered as a guide and help in public worship”<sup>22</sup> in order “to preserve unity of spirit within diversity of forms”<sup>23</sup> in the proclamation of the word of God and the celebration of the sacraments. Its only authority is its intrinsic worth as an imperfect human resource for those who seek to worship God in the beauty and duty of holiness.

### **THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT OF WORSHIP**

The church is called in every generation to celebrate the full message of salvation in the context of the particular time and place given it by God. Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday, today, and for ever,”<sup>24</sup> but the language, customs, and historical situation of the people of God are continually changing. The Book of Worship reflects the intention of the United Church of Christ to respond faithfully to God’s saving initiative in ways that speak to the spiritual hunger of all people in this time and place. Several contemporary emphases that stem from this intention inform the services contained in the Book of Worship and deserve brief attention.

The Eleventh General Synod explicitly instructed that a Book of Worship be characterized by language that is truly inclusive with respect to God and to human beings. Although the generic use of masculine terms may have been acceptable in the past, it excludes and offends many sensitive people of faith today. Further, the use of only masculine nouns and pronouns for God and of masculine generic terms for humankind has hidden the rich feminine imagery for God and God’s people in scripture. The rediscovery of the complementarity of female and male metaphors in the Bible and the literature of the early church forbids Christians to settle for literary poverty in the midst of literary riches.<sup>25</sup>

In response to this rediscovery, care has been taken to avoid exclusively male terms for God. For example, the word God is frequently used where the masculine word Lord predominated in the past. Lord is retained as an important title to identify Jesus Christ, but not the only title. In general, masculine language is not used in reference to Jesus Christ except where there is some necessity to identify Jesus by gender. In a similar way, diverse masculine and feminine images are used for the people of God. The

witness of women of faith in the biblical story is treated with the same dignity accorded the witness of men of faith.

Inclusive language is far more than a matter of male and female imagery. Behind the aesthetic dimension of human words towers the prophetic issue of social justice. It is obvious to people of goodwill that words have the power to exploit and disfranchise as well as to affirm and liberate those to whom they refer.<sup>26</sup> Language that is truly inclusive affirms not only human sexuality but also racial and ethnic background and diverse stages of maturity from infancy to old age. It shows respect for people with handicapping conditions, people who do not live in the traditional nuclear family, people who suffer addictions, and others who intentionally identify themselves by some particular need or characteristic. If people do not find themselves in the language of worship or find themselves there in derogatory images, it should not be surprising if they absent themselves from the worshipping community.<sup>27</sup>

This Book of Worship seeks to underscore the inseparable connection between liturgy and ethics not only by means of inclusive language but also by maintaining a biblical tension between Christian nurture and Christian witness. The services show that liturgy is a recalling of God's acts in history for the world and its salvation and at the same time a communal and personal answering of God's call to service in the world.

The issue of inclusive language and other concerns for social justice point toward even larger areas of wholeness. In practically all churches that are experiencing liturgical renewal, there is a deep regard for denominational traditions that have been cherished, as well as an ecumenical longing to explore parts of the gospel that have received inadequate attention within a particular denomination.<sup>28</sup> This Book of Worship, for example, reflects with a new clarity not only the cross of Jesus Christ that dominates much of Reformation theology but also the fullness of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. The services, especially the services of word and sacrament, invite participants to remember the whole story of the history of salvation and to celebrate that story as the church that stands on the Easter side of the cross and tomb.

Out of respect for the total person, the services address human senses as well as rational minds. They offer opportunities for music and other arts, various postures and movements, silence, and the full active participation of the congregation in acts and words that are readily shared. The services also recognize that people have differing abilities to use these senses and acknowledge that physical limitations are to be considered as worship is planned. There is a reverence before God's mystery and majesty and a reticence to use power language, military imagery, or the jargon of triumphalism either for God or the church. This reverence for God calls forth reverence for the image of God in all human beings including children. Today the question of how children relate to worship is being pursued with renewed interest. The central place given to children in the preaching of Jesus and the caution that unless people become like little children they cannot enter the realm of God call into question some prohibitions concerning children at worship.<sup>29</sup>

The role of children in Holy Communion is especially debated. Until recently the principal objection to their participation in the sacrament was their inability to "discern the body of Christ" in the meal (1 Corinthians 11:29). Recent biblical scholarship challenges this interpretation of scripture. It recognizes in Paul's words not a concern for a cognitive understanding of sacramental presence but a concern for an experience of the body of Christ present in the community of faith that Christ gathers as the church.<sup>30</sup>

With this communal understanding, in which discernment is primarily a recognition of belonging and not merely a matter of intellectual comprehension, adult Christians are urged to ask "whether, by excluding children from the Lord's Supper, we are not equally guilty [with the offending Corinthians] of failing to 'discern the body' and, therefore, of endangering the reality of the supper."<sup>31</sup>

In Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, the churches are asked to study the place of children in worship with specific reference to Holy Communion.<sup>32</sup> Churches are urged by Christian educators and others to include children in all aspects of church life as fully as possible. How churches respond to children “is of importance, not simply as a liturgical concern but as an ethical concern,” because God calls the church to “receive them as gifts.”<sup>33</sup>

There is a renewed awareness in the Book of Worship of the church as the church of Pentecost, the church of the Holy Spirit, living between the time of Christ’s coming at Bethlehem and Christ’s coming again at the close of history. The full texts of the prayers for Holy Communion and baptism include reminders that the great cloud of witnesses and the church of today form the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. At the center of all the human words stands the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, the firstborn of all creation, who says to the servant church anew, “If I be lifted up, I will draw all unto me.”<sup>34</sup>

### **THE LEADERSHIP OF WORSHIP**

The line between leading the people of God in worship and displacing them in worship is a precariously thin one. It is significant that in the New Testament, as in Judaism, the leadership of worship was a shared responsibility. In the church of the first four centuries, this collegial model of leadership prevailed. It was common for several people to concelebrate word and sacrament in services full of congregational participation.

Then leadership fell into the hands of an officiant acting alone. “Services came to be celebrated for the people rather than by them,” and the worship of God “became a spectator sport.”<sup>35</sup> In churches in the East and West alike, liturgical action became remote from the laity, who often paid for rites they did not bother to attend.

The Reformation of the sixteenth century only partially restored the active role of the congregation. In the twentieth century there has been a remarkable resurgence of congregational involvement in the planning and leading of worship. There are hopeful signs that Christian worship today is approaching the level of participation evident in the early church.

This Book of Worship is offered to all who plan, lead, and participate in the worship of God. It is especially important in the United Church of Christ, where the freedom of local churches to order their own worship life is steadfastly maintained, that great care be taken to exercise that freedom with the commensurate responsibility that it requires. It is also a matter of honesty to recognize that the distinction between liturgical worship and free worship is often more imagined than real. It has rightly been observed that fixed orders can breathe with variety, that informal ones are characterized by discernible patterns, and that both “are equally ritual because it is impossible to vary them every time they are used.”<sup>36</sup> John Calvin, a pioneer in liturgical reform, cautioned even as he reshaped the worship of his time that “we ought not to resort to innovation rashly or frequently, or for trivial causes.”<sup>37</sup> His counsel is of special relevance during the liturgical revolution of this generation.

What is the relationship between a service book of any kind and freedom, spontaneity, and informality in the worship life of the church? In the United Church of Christ the relationship is determined by each local church. Even local churches of the United Church of Christ that share the heritage of using a book of worship covet nonetheless the right to do so in ways appropriate to their local customs and felt needs.

Contrary to popular stereotypes, those local churches that trace their roots to the Puritan and free church traditions have consistently reserved the right not only to refrain from using prayer books but also to use

them. Henry Martyn Dexter, writing about Congregational worship from the colonial days to 1880, made this assessment of how free the free church tradition can be:

Any Congregational church, whose taste and sense of expediency may so incline it, is at perfect liberty to order its worship by the liturgy of the Church of England, or the Protestant or Reformed Episcopal Church of the United States, or by a liturgy of its own. So long as it does nothing which shall give reasonable ground of offense to the other churches with which it is in fellowship, it may order its prayers, its praise, and all the methods of its worship, to its own entire content; and its pastor, remaining true to our fundamentals of doctrine and polity, though enrobed and endowed . . . with “chasuble, alb, amice, stole, maniple and zone, with two blessed towels, and all their appendages,” would remain, in good faith and entirely, a Congregational minister still.<sup>38</sup>

Clearly, free church does not translate simplistically into a church free from all forms. Rather, it denotes a church that includes within the parameters of its freedom the uninhibited liberty to use whatever forms prove to be consistent with its understanding and practice of the gospel.

Where the Book of Worship is received in this spirit, it will not compromise the freedom, spontaneity, or informality of the worship life of any local church. It may, in fact, broaden the diversity and deepen the experience of those very characteristics. One thing that it will not do, when used properly, is relieve the local church of the responsibility of providing careful planning and prepared leadership for its worship life. History is replete with examples of empty and corrupt worship that afflicted the people of God precisely because a responsibility that belonged to the whole people of God was abandoned into the hands of the few who eagerly assumed it. The Book of Worship is an invitation to every local church to commit itself anew to the hard work of the people of God—the *leitourgia* (worship)—that is the vocation of every Christian and of every local church.

### **PASTORAL LEADERSHIP**

Ordained ministers of the United Church of Christ, by virtue of their ordination vows, the traditions of the church, and the constitutions and bylaws of local churches, are entrusted with primary responsibility for preaching and teaching the gospel, administering the sacraments and rites of the church, and exercising pastoral care and leadership. Their role in leading worship has been compared with that of a first chair musician or a concertmaster rather than with that of a conductor. It is clearly the function of ordained ministers to work in close collaboration with lay people in planning and leading worship. This role presumes that adequate preparation is provided and that ordained ministers seek constantly to grow in their understanding of the theology and practice of worship.

As ordained ministers seek to fulfill their partnership with lay people in worship, it is imperative that adequate time be allowed for study, creative planning, and the rehearsal of services that may require it. Attention will be given not only to the words of worship but also to symbolism, choreography, and dramatic integrity. Shared leadership in the conduct of services will permit different people to fulfill specific roles without leaving the assembly confused about who is presiding.

Ordained ministers and lay people who share the leadership of worship have a particular responsibility to consult and cooperate with church musicians. If the ecumenical lectionary or another schedule of readings, the church year, and special emphases of any other kind are to inform worship in an integrated manner, church musicians will need opportunity for the selection and rehearsal of appropriate music.

### **LAY LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION**

Lay leaders of worship, in the exercise of the priesthood of all believers, bear a responsibility to prepare for their ministry. They need to be people of prayer, informed concerning the worship heritage of the church, and willing to participate in available training for the roles they assume. Their ministry may include roles of leadership—leading various parts of the service, reading scripture, preaching the sermon. Their roles may be supportive—ushers, acolytes, servers of Holy Communion, choir members, greeters, floral artists, or other roles approved by the local church.

The entire worshipping congregation is called to exercise its priesthood through dynamic participation in all aspects of the church's liturgical life. Christians do not go to church; they gather as the church. There is mutual responsibility of chancel and pew for the proclamation of the word and the celebration of the sacraments.

This full involvement of the whole people of God in worship is affirmed not only by churches of the Protestant Reformation but also by the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches as well. In answer to those who say, "I don't get anything out of going to church," an Orthodox theologian replies, "If you really expect to 'get something' out of church attendance, you must give. It is not enough just to sit in church. You must take an active part in its worship."<sup>39</sup> The Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church urged that all the faithful "be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy."<sup>40</sup> Concerning the focus of the current liturgical renewal taking place in that church, the Council added, "This full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered above all else, for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit."<sup>41</sup>

What does this active participation require? Clearly it involves more than being present at a place of worship at a stated hour. That approach to worship presumes that worshipers are the audience and that God, or God's servants in the chancel, are the performers. The action, in fact, is the other way around. The worshipping congregation, including those who lead it, are the ones who offer worship, and God is the one to whom it is offered. This awareness places significant responsibility upon all the people of God to live daily lives rooted and grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ and to seek the presence of the Holy Spirit in prayer, study, planning, and preparation, culminating in acts of worship filled with the grace and power of Pentecost. When reflection and action are joined in this way, Luther's emphasis on the consolations of grace and Calvin's emphasis on the demands of grace find mutual correction and wholeness.<sup>42</sup> Responsibility is also placed on churches to break down barriers that prevent all people from worshipping together.

No other obstacle to congregational participation in worship looms larger than human resistance to change. It is instructive that even churches accustomed to authorized prayer books affirm "the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free" and admonish succeeding generations to change the forms of worship "according to the various exigencies of times and occasions."<sup>43</sup>

No book of worship or mimeographed service or spontaneously announced order of worship can assure that people will worship God in spirit and truth. In order for any of these forms to become more than disconnected dry bones of devotion, it is necessary that every Christian, inspired by the Holy Spirit, actively take his or her place in the body of Christ, the living and breathing community of faith that is "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people."<sup>44</sup>

## MUSIC AND OTHER ARTS

"The Christian liturgy was born singing and has never ceased to sing."<sup>45</sup> Music is a treasure of the people of God that has held a place of singular honor from Old Testament times to the present as a principal means by which praise and adoration are offered to God in communal worship. The Psalter and other

hymns of Israel testify to the power of vocal and instrumental music as artistic forms nobly suited to the celebration of God's saving deeds. In the New Testament, from the song of Mary to the hymn of the angels at Jesus' birth to Paul's great hymns about Christ to the trumpets and victorious doxology of the heavenly host in the book of Revelation, God's love for humanity is proclaimed in music that continues to fill the spheres.

The literature of the church of the first four centuries echoes the Bible's "joyful noise" and provides magnificent hymns. Augustine, a champion of sacred music, believed that those who sing pray twice. The Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century, although they held different views on the use of organs and other musical instruments, affirmed the singing of psalms as one means by which the priesthood of all believers may be expressed.<sup>46</sup> The Roman Catholic Church shares this view and has declared boldly that "the music tradition of the universal church is a treasure of immeasurable value, greater even than that of any other art."<sup>47</sup>

This Book of Worship honors the place of music in the continuing pilgrimage of the people of God and invites musicians to employ their art fully in the worship life of the church. Opportunity is given for the singing of hymns, psalms, anthems, or other parts of the liturgy. Provision is made for instrumental music, including the sounds of instruments other than the organ. Choirs, whether large or small in number, have a special responsibility to enrich the services with anthems and to lead the people in congregational singing. Musicians who are diligent stewards of their art are knowledgeable concerning diverse ways of presenting hymns and psalms. They are able to open to the worshiping community the vast treasury of the church's sacred music.

It is the "task of the musician to bear the word faithfully," through music; it is the task of the worshiping congregation to offer musicians cooperation and support.<sup>48</sup> This requires an openness to learn new hymns and a willingness to grow in the breadth of understanding and appreciation of diverse styles of music. It calls for patience with congregational rehearsals and the commitment to serve on music committees, sing in choirs, and provide for the cost of the ministry of music.

Through full partnership in this ministry, the worshiping congregation is able to become an anthem of praise to God in words, acts, and sounds that unite the church in heaven and on earth.

Other forms of art also have their rightful place in the worship of God. The Old Testament honors silversmiths, cabinetmakers, architects, and other artisans who offered their skills to the glory of God. The New Testament affirms the diversity of human gifts and calls upon all Christians to use their talents for the common good in service rendered to God. The early church, worshiping in homes and later in simple buildings called the "Lord's" house, created symbols to announce the Christian message visually. Some frescoes and other works of art that were ancient symbols have survived to the present day. Another element common to early Christian worship was the use of gesture and movement. Their Jewish heritage had steeped the first Christians in an appreciation of the body as an instrument of praise and supplication. Prayers were fulsome gestures, with participants' arms lifted high in outreach to God. Celebrations of salvific events were seldom complete without a processional dance, whether solemn or exuberant in spirit. Prophets and rulers sought inspiration and expressed faithful dependence on God in movement and dance.<sup>49</sup> Psalms, and later Christian hymns, were often accompanied by the movement of the entire congregation in simple line or circle formations.<sup>50</sup>

As such expressions were lost or overtly secularized, liturgical use of movement was minimized, especially after the Reformation. The twentieth century church, particularly in the United States, has seen a renewal of interest in sacred dance.<sup>51</sup> Dancers and those who do not dance alike are engaged in this recovery of the biblical and early Christian sense of worship through movement, a type of discourse especially appropriate to express the rich diversity of spirit of the church year.<sup>52</sup>

A confession, an offertory, or a blessing in dance will be a new experience for some, so judicious planning and thoughtful preparation are needed when introducing movement into worship. When movement, such as a procession, is planned for the whole congregation, consideration must be given to the physical abilities of the people.

In creative partnership with the best of music and other arts, this form of praise is well adapted to both small and large churches. Through movement, many may come to appreciate the symbolic nature of truly embodied faith, fitting testimony to the presence of the Incarnate One.

The arts are not immune to abuse. Frequently the church has had to deal with the issue of artistic forms that obscure the gospel rather than proclaim it. This sometimes occurs with the space used for worship. Forms of worship change, but buildings yield to change reluctantly and usually only at considerable expense. Church architecture is a sermon in walls, floors, and ceilings. If its form no longer relevantly announces the good news of God's love that is celebrated in Christian worship, it is the responsibility of the people of God, with the assistance of able architects, to reform the space and rearrange or replace the furniture. Where this is not done, buildings erected to be servants of right worship become rulers that prohibit liturgical renewal or barriers to worshipers because of inaccessibility.

The proper use of the arts is one way the church celebrates creation as God's gift and echoes God's pronouncement that all that has been made is "good." To hearts of faith, the entire creation points to God. The arts are called to do the same. The signs through which the liturgical arts are expressed, including the literary signs of words printed in worship books, "are not there to reflect our own light. Neither are they themselves a source of light. They refract into our bodily and worldly existence a light that comes from elsewhere. They are not there to be seen but to see by. They are to open our eyes to other things."<sup>53</sup> The test of the liturgical arts is whether they merely point to themselves or whether they point to God and thereby summon worshipers to unite with their neighbors on the pilgrimage toward the holy city, the New Jerusalem not made by human hands, eternal in the heavens, whose builder and maker is God.

### **RELATIONSHIP OF THE CHURCH YEAR AND THE LECTIONARY**

Christians, from the New Testament age to the present, regard time not only as a product of nature but also as a parable of God's saving action in human history. The people of Israel, in an earlier age, transformed the festivals of Canaan's agricultural cycle into a sermon-in-time that proclaimed the Exodus and other saving events. In a similar way, the church transformed Jewish festivals and secular holidays into a calendar of salvation history.

The expectation of the early return of Jesus Christ conditioned the New Testament church on the side of restraint and simplicity in the development of its worship life.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, the New Testament itself contains the first evidence of the evolution of a calendar of holy days and of a schedule of readings for special occasions. Easter and Sunday, respectively, became the annual and weekly signposts in time of the resurrection of the crucified Christ. There is reason to believe that the Gospel of Mark is organized for the purpose of relating its contents to a pattern of readings for a primitive version of the church year.<sup>55</sup> The very concept of such a schedule of readings, or a lectionary, was already an intrinsic part of the synagogue worship of Jesus' day.<sup>56</sup>

The relationship between the church year and the lectionary is more than coincidental.<sup>57</sup> When either is neglected, the other suffers as well.<sup>58</sup> The two are bound closely in their historical development. Although there was great diversity among the churches during the formative period of this development, there were also common factors. Consequently, by the end of the fourth century A.D., it is clear that various

primitive lectionaries were in use, and that “before the Roman Empire had passed away, the majestic structure of the church year was established, representing the conquest for Christ of the invisible world of time.”<sup>59</sup>

## THE CHURCH YEAR

The brief descriptions of the seasons and days of the church year are ordered here by current use rather than by their historical development.

Advent is the season of anticipation and preparation that precedes Christmas in the churches in the West. It was first identified in the fourth century by Hilary of Poitiers who indicated that it was observed for a three-week period in Gaul.<sup>60</sup> In some instances the season was related not to Christmas but to the older Eastern feast of Christ’s birth, Epiphany.<sup>61</sup> In the Middle Ages, the Western church gradually reduced the period from an eighth-century pattern of six weeks to four weeks.

Now the first Sunday in Advent is the fourth Sunday before December 25. The focus of the season includes not only preparation for the anniversary of Christ’s birth but also the anticipation of Christ’s return at the close of history. The early festal nature of the season has been rediscovered in this generation.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, the penitential emphasis no longer dominates. The seasonal color, purple, announces Christ’s royalty. In some traditions blue is used, jointly symbolizing royalty and hope.

Christmas, the festival day of the birth of Jesus Christ, falls on December 25 in the church in the West. This date in the ancient Roman calendar was observed as a winter solstice holiday associated with non-Christian rituals of light. By the year A.D. 354, the church in the West had transformed the day into the annual festival of the one born to be the Light of the World.<sup>63</sup> White, the color of the season, is appropriately used from Christmas Eve through at least the first Sunday in Epiphany. The season is one of joyful celebration.

Epiphany, which means manifestation or disclosure, is observed on January 6. Its origins are rooted in the winter solstice holiday of the eastern regions of the Roman Empire. In Jerusalem, the day was transformed by the church into a festival of the incarnation.<sup>64</sup> Egeria, a Spanish woman of the fourth century, provided an eyewitness account of the celebration of Epiphany in Bethlehem.<sup>65</sup> Although other Christians in the eastern provinces celebrated both Jesus’ birth and baptism on this day, in the region of Jerusalem only the incarnation was observed.

At a very early time in the East, the visit of Jesus to the marriage feast of Cana became part of the Epiphany celebration.<sup>66</sup> In later developments in the West, the visit of the Magi became the predominant theme of the day. Today, these several strands continue to influence Epiphany, with the baptism of Jesus being observed on the first Sunday of the Epiphany season. Although the color of the day of Epiphany and the first Sunday of the season of Epiphany is white, different practices exist for the remainder of the season. Some churches, emphasizing the person of Christ, continue with white. Others, emphasizing the manifestation of Christ to the whole world, change to green from the second Sunday until the close of the season. Green is the color of the church in mission and symbolizes its life and growth. In some traditions, the last Sunday of the season is observed as the Festival of the Transfiguration, with white as the liturgical color.

Lent is a penitential season of self-examination, prayer, and fasting that precedes the observance of the Triduum (Maundy Thursday evening, Good Friday, and the Vigil of Easter which begins on Saturday night). In Western churches, the season opens on Ash Wednesday and consists of forty days excluding Sundays. The term Lent is derived from roots that mean to lengthen. The Lenten season points to the spring of the year and to the increasing daylight hours which spring brings.

Lent is first clearly documented in Canon Five of the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325).<sup>67</sup> However, the practice of a pre-Easter period of discipline is much older. A century earlier, Hippolytus of Rome mentioned a two-and-one-half-week fast prior to Easter. In some places this season was the intensified period of preparation for those who were to be baptized on the eve of Easter.

The color for the season of Lent, beginning with Ash Wednesday and including Sundays, is purple. Some traditions, however, recommend black for Ash Wednesday.

The earliest extant reference to Ash Wednesday is in the Gelasian Sacramentary of the seventh century. It is customary in some traditions to mark the forehead of Christians with ashes on this day. The use of ashes is based on several scriptural texts, including Genesis 3:19 and 18:27, Jeremiah 6:26, and Jonah 3:6.

Holy Week, beginning with Palm/Passion Sunday, marks the final week of Lent. Egeria described a procession to Bethany “six days before the Passover,” on which occasion the story of the raising of Lazarus was read in anticipation of Christ’s passion.<sup>68</sup> She placed the event on the Saturday before Palm Sunday. In the medieval period, churches in the West began to observe Passion Sunday on the Sunday before Palm Sunday.<sup>69</sup> In recent calendar revisions, most churches have combined the Passion and Palm Sunday themes. They have reduced the Palm Sunday observance of Christ’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem to an opening or entrance rite and have made the sixth Sunday in Lent predominantly an anticipation of Christ’s passion. In some traditions the color recommended for Palm/ Passion Sunday and the weekdays before Maundy Thursday is red. The color is reminiscent of martyrdom.

Maundy Thursday commemorates the institution of Holy Communion and the giving of the new commandment (mandatum) that people should love one another even as Christ loves them (John 13:34-35). It also is an appropriate occasion for the rite of washing the feet. In most traditions the color for the day is white in keeping with the glad receiving of the gift of Holy Communion. In those churches where red is introduced on Palm/Passion Sunday, it may remain in use on Maundy Thursday. It is the custom of many churches at the conclusion of the last service on Maundy Thursday to strip the chancel of all paraments and altar hangings in preparation for Good Friday.

Good Friday and Easter, in the earliest celebrations of the church, were combined in a unified rite. Peter Cobb has stated: “Originally, when the Feast of Feasts emerges into the light of history in the second century, it is a unitive commemoration of the death and resurrection of the Lord, a nocturnal celebration of a single night, constituting the Christian Passover.”<sup>70</sup> However, very early, as Egeria attested, special services were held on Good Friday. She described a fourth century vigil at the site of the cross that began at noon and ended at 3:00 P.M.<sup>71</sup> This separation of the events of Good Friday from those of Easter Sunday, especially in the West, contributed to an emphasis on the death of Christ in the celebration of Holy Communion “to the exclusion of the resurrection and ascension.”<sup>72</sup>

Easter, in the most ancient celebrations of the church, was a vigil service that began on Saturday night of Holy Week and extended into the dawn of Easter day. The Eastern Church has preserved this order without interruption to the present time. In the West, the Easter Vigil is now being reintroduced in many churches. This nocturnal service announces with great power that “certainly the cross and resurrection, seen as a unity, did constitute the new Exodus.”<sup>73</sup> White is the color for all the services of Easter Day and the Easter season, including the vigil. The services are the most joyful of all the celebrations of the church year. In many churches this Resurrection Day remains the principal festival on which Christian baptism is celebrated.

Pentecost, the fiftieth day after Easter, closes the Easter season. During this entire period of fifty days, the oldest of the seasons in the church, Egeria reported that “not a single person fasts.”<sup>74</sup> Pentecost, borrowed

from the Jewish calendar of feasts but transformed by the experience of the church described in Acts 2, originally combined the themes of Christ's ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit. In the fourth century the two events were separated, and the ascension was placed on the fortieth day after Easter, a Thursday ten days before Pentecost.<sup>75</sup> The color for the day of Pentecost is red in vivid commemoration of the tongues of fire described in Acts 2.

In some churches the Sunday following Pentecost is observed as Trinity Sunday. However, this festival in observance of a doctrine about God rather than of an event in history lacks ancient precedent. Where it is celebrated, white is the usual color.

The Sundays following the day of Pentecost are usually identified by their numerical sequence: the first Sunday after Pentecost, etc. The seasonal color is green. This is the long season of the church in mission.<sup>76</sup> In some traditions the last Sunday in the season, the Sunday before Advent begins, is observed as the Festival of Christ the Sovereign. The color, white, associated with all the festivals of Christ's life, is used when this occurs.

## THE LECTIONARY

The use of lectionaries or schedules of readings for particular days is one way the church has labored to guarantee that the story of the Christian faith is grounded in divine revelation and in history. Egeria wrote that on the weekly commemoration of Easter, "the bishop reads the Gospel of the Lord's resurrection at first cockcrow, as he does on every Sunday throughout the year."<sup>77</sup> It is not surprising, especially in the land of Christ's ministry, that special readings became attached to particular days, events, and places that eventually shaped the core of the church year.

The oldest extant manuscript of a lectionary currently available is one developed in Edessa in A.D. 475.<sup>78</sup> Considerable freedom was left to church leaders to choose readings spontaneously. However, as early as Augustine's time, there is evidence that the people frowned upon any departure from the scheduled readings for major holy days.<sup>79</sup> The earliest fully developed lectionary now known is that of Alcuin of York. It dates to A.D. 790 and includes readings for the major festival days, the Sundays within the seasons, and for twenty-four Sundays after Pentecost.<sup>80</sup>

In the sixteenth century, most Protestant reformers at first retained the old Roman lectionary. However, a preference soon developed for the continuous reading of the Bible in sequence, leading to the widespread custom in reformed churches of leaving the choice of readings to the clergy. By 1758, a lay person in the Church of Scotland criticized the clergy for choosing the readings arbitrarily, so as to "mangle them" and "make them say" what the preacher desired.<sup>81</sup> In the past two hundred years, diverse lectionaries have been developed by the churches of the Reformation. In some instances the old Roman lectionary was revived and revised.

In the twentieth century, a resurgence of biblical scholarship moved the churches to reexamine the question of a lectionary. The Roman Catholic Church, in response to the reforms mandated by the Second Vatican Council, published a new three-year lectionary in 1969. This lectionary contained three readings and a psalm for each major Christian festival and for all Sundays of the year. The reintroduction of an Old Testament reading, along with the Epistle and Gospel selections, corrected a deficiency that dates to the fifth century.

This contemporary lectionary, acclaimed and significantly revised by representatives of the churches participating in the Consultation on Common Texts, holds great promise for gaining widespread acceptance in North America and throughout the English-speaking world. This Common Lectionary contains a valuable introduction in which its history, structure, and function are carefully explained.<sup>82</sup>

The Common Lectionary is commended to all local churches of the United Church of Christ for study and use. Its schedule of readings is published annually in the United Church of Christ Desk Calendar and Plan Book.

Why use a lectionary in a denomination that cherishes the freedom of its local churches to order their worship according to their own norms? One reason is that given by the Second Vatican Council and affirmed by uncounted voices throughout the ecumenical church: “The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God’s Word. In this way a more representative portion of the holy scriptures will be read to the people over a set cycle of years.”<sup>83</sup> In local churches in which the Common Lectionary is used, worshipers are assured of hearing in the period of three years most of the Old Testament and practically all the New Testament.

The readings are ordered, in part, by the selection of Old Testament readings that are thematically related to the Gospel for the day, with a semi continuous reading of the assigned Epistle. In some seasons a more continuous reading of the Old Testament is provided. The Psalms, once the honored hymn book of Reformation churches, are reintroduced and coordinated thematically with the Old Testament reading. Where non-canonical readings are indicated, alternate selections from the canonical scriptures are included.

Among the benefits of the Common Lectionary, few are more coveted than the sharing of the same Bible readings on any given occasion by Christians who worship in different communions but are called to live their faith in a common world. The use of the lectionary makes it possible for laity as well as clergy, ecumenically if they wish, to study the readings with others prior to hearing them offered in worship. It holds the promise of allowing the full message of the Bible to address the attentive heart that is open not only to favored texts but also to the entire word of God.

The church year and the lectionary deserve thoughtful use, not because they are law. They witness to the Word made flesh and enable the church to proclaim faithfully the story it has been told, the story that it lives, and the story that it is privileged to tell to the end of time.

## **LINKING THE CHURCH**

Faithfulness to God’s call in Jesus Christ requires that Christians respond in timely ways to the One who is the same yesterday, today, and for ever. This Book of Worship, like all books of worship, is transitional literature. It seeks to provide a small span in the bridge that will traverse and link the worshiping church of the twentieth century with the church of the past and the church of the twenty-first century. To the extent that it serves faithfully in this endeavor, it deserves careful study, prayerful reflection, and imaginative use.

# **Order for the Service of Word and Sacrament I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This order is shaped by traditional forms characteristic of orders of worship found in the Western church. It reflects the unitive structure of the primitive Services of Word and Sacrament known to us by the witness of Justin Martyr, Hippolytus, Egeria, and others. It is also informed by insights of the Protestant Reformation and the most recent ecumenical consensus concerning worship, including the

recommendations of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry from the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches.

This order reflects the human response found in the sixth chapter of Isaiah. Here the prophet first answers God's mysterious presence with adoration and then experiences contrition, confession, and absolution. Instruction from God and a call to God's service follow. Isaiah's "yes" to God is celebrated in a divine commissioning. This order is informed by Isaiah's experience and conveys a sense of the majesty of God. Its central focus is God's victory over sin and death in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In this order, as in the second order, the confession of sin is integrally related to the passing of the peace as a reminder that Christians ask God to forgive them "as we forgive those who trespass against us." Peace with God is inseparable from peace with neighbors. In ancient times those not yet baptized were dismissed following the Service of the Word prior to the prayers and the offertory that introduced the Service of the Sacrament. For this reason, the confession of sin occurred midway in the total service and was often integrated within the general prayers of intercession. In later times when the worship of the church was open to the public, the confession of sin was moved to a much earlier place in the opening acts of the Service of the Word. The use of the prayer for mercy in this part of the order and the use of other traditional forms elsewhere provide an opportunity to express the universal heritage of the Christian faith. Through the use of words and acts common to the church across the centuries and around the world, participants show that they are equally "citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."<sup>1</sup>

The sermon, in the early church and the churches of the Reformation, is essential to worship rightly ordered. The proclamation of the Christian message by this means was so treasured among early Christians that more than one sermon in a given service was not unusual. Christ's presence in the act of preaching is a real presence of the one who promised, "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."<sup>2</sup> The sermon, though not sacramental in the tangible sense made possible by material signs, is a witness endowed with grace through which human words attest to the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us.

The prayers of the people and the concerns of the church are closely related to the offertory. This placement is a sign that they are part of the worship offered to God with monetary gifts and the bread and wine, all of which represent the life and labor of the community of faith.

The invitation and the call to the supper emphasize that all people of faith are welcome at Christ's table. The invitation and call celebrate not only the memory of a meal that is past, but an actual meal with the risen Christ that is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet at which Christ will preside at the end of history. The texts and outlines for the communion prayer seek to summarize God's words and deeds in history for the world and for its salvation. Provision is made for the entire congregation to say or sing parts of this central prayer that stands at the heart of the order, and comes to its climax in the Prayer of Our Savior.

The visible breaking of the bread and pouring of the wine are symbolic actions with double significance. The wheat that is gathered to make one loaf and the grapes that are pressed to make one cup remind participants that they are one in the body of Christ, the church. But the breaking and the pouring also announce the costliness of Christ's sacrificial life and of the discipleship to which all are called. The use of the traditional "Lamb of God," whether said or sung, reintroduces the theme of penitence just before Holy Communion is received.

The manner of distributing Holy Communion is not prescribed in the United Church of Christ. The practice of using individual cubes of bread and individual cups was introduced in the nineteenth century. Prior to that time, the usual mode of distribution was a common loaf and a common cup. Where the congregation received the bread and wine in their pews, it was sometimes necessary for those charged

with serving the people to use a portion of the loaf and a separate cup adequate to serve one section of the room. The mode of intinction—dipping the bread in the wine and receiving both simultaneously—is an ancient custom still practiced as the norm in Eastern Orthodox churches. Also in the nineteenth century, grape juice became available and replaced wine in some churches. The biblical record supports most clearly the custom of one loaf and one cup shared in sequence.

The post-communion prayer is both a prayer of thanksgiving and an affirmation of the willingness of those who received communion to serve God.

The service concludes with the Song of Simeon, followed by a commissioning and a blessing. The movement is from meal to mission.

In this order, as in others, the prelude and postlude are an intrinsic part of the worship and stand within the total order of the service.

## **OUTLINE**

Prelude  
Greeting  
Sentences of Adoration  
Hymn of Adoration  
Confession of Sin  
Silence  
Prayer for Mercy  
Assurance of Pardon  
Passing the Peace  
Act of Praise  
Reading of Scripture  
Sermon  
Affirmation of Faith  
Hymn, Anthem, or Other Music  
Prayers of the People  
Concerns of the Church  
Offertory  
Invitation  
Communion Prayer  
Prayer of Our Savior  
Breaking Bread and Pouring Wine  
Lamb of God  
Call to the Supper  
Sharing the Elements  
Prayer of Thanksgiving  
Hymn of Parting  
Song of Simeon  
Commissioning  
Benediction  
Postlude

## **PRELUDE**

*The service may begin with music as the congregation gathers. The greeting and sentences of adoration or the hymn may follow, according to local custom.*

### **GREETING**

*All who are able may stand for one of these or another greeting informed by scripture.*

A

LEADER

In the name of the triune God: the Creator, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

ALL

Amen.

B

LEADER

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.<sup>3</sup>

PEOPLE

And also with you.

*C for use except during Lent*

LEADER

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

PEOPLE

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

### **SENTENCES OF ADORATION**

*All who are able may stand as one or more of the following sentences or others appropriate for the day or season are said.*

A

LEADER

Our help is in the name of the Holy One, who made heaven and earth.<sup>4</sup>

B

LEADER

Christ, our paschal lamb, has been offered for us. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival.<sup>5</sup>

C

LEADER

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.<sup>6</sup>

D

LEADER

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.<sup>7</sup>

E

LEADER

God has brought the people of the covenant from the land of bondage into freedom.

F

LEADER

Jesus came to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year of God's favor.<sup>8</sup>

### **HYMN OF ADORATION**

*All who are able may stand. This may be a processional hymn.*

### **CONFESSION OF SIN**

*The people may be seated. A leader may offer one of these prayers or one in his or her own words.*

A

LEADER

We are called to examine our faithfulness to God's covenant with us. God, in whose presence we gather, promises us grace and pardon when we acknowledge our weakness and shame. Let us confess our sin to almighty God.

ALL

Eternal God, whose Word is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path, we recognize and confess that we have failed to respond fully to your gracious presence in our lives. Through Jesus Christ you have offered us new life, fulfillment, and the freedom to serve you. We confess that we are captive to sin, that our sin binds us with false pride, and that the wrong we do is made worse by the good we leave undone. Reconcile us to you and to all people. God of mercy, forgive all our sin and strengthen us anew for life as you intend it; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

B

LEADER

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

PEOPLE

But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.<sup>9</sup>

LEADER

Let us confess our sins before God and one another.

ALL

Most merciful God, we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and follow in your ways, to the glory of your name. Amen.<sup>10</sup>

**SILENCE**

*Silence may be observed for reflection and prayer.*

### **PRAYER FOR MERCY**

*The Kyrie, Trisagion, or other words may be said or sung. Musical settings are on pages 449, 450, and 459.*

A  
LEADER  
Lord, have mercy.

PEOPLE  
Christ, have mercy.

LEADER  
Lord, have mercy.

B  
LEADER  
Holy God, Holy and mighty, Holy Immortal One,

ALL  
Have mercy upon us.

### **ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

*A leader may speak of Gods pardon and mercy, using one of the following or her or his own words.*

A  
LEADER  
God hears the confession of our hearts and lips. Through Jesus Christ we are forgiven all our sins, and by the Holy Spirit we are empowered for new life.

ALL  
We believe the good news of Jesus Christ. Amen.

B  
LEADER  
Anyone in Christ becomes a new person altogether; the past is finished and gone, everything has become fresh and new. Friends, believe the good news of the gospel:

ALL  
In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.<sup>11</sup>

### **PASSING THE PEACE**

*As a sign of their reconciliation with God and each other, all may greet those around them with an embrace or a handshake, accompanied by such words as: “The peace of God be with you,” and the response: “And also with you.” All who are able may rise for the passing of the peace. Leaders of the service may move among the congregation to share the signs of peace.*

## ACT OF PRAISE

*All who are able may stand for a call to praise and a hymn, psalm, or gloria.*

LEADER

Let us sing praise to God.

ALL

We will continually praise God's holy name.

A

*A hymn, psalm, or gloria such as the following may be read or sung.*

ALL

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth. Holy One, heavenly God, sovereign God and Creator, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. Lord Jesus Christ, God's only begotten one, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of Majesty: receive our prayer. For you alone are the Messiah, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of the triune God. Amen.

B

*This gloria may be said or sung. Musical settings are on pages 451 and 460.*

ALL

Glory to God the Creator, and to the Christ, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

## READING OF SCRIPTURE

*The people may be seated as the scripture lessons are introduced. It is recommended that the schedule of readings found in the ecumenical lectionary be used. If it is not, care should be taken to maintain a balance in readings from the Old Testament, the Epistles, and the Gospels.*

*A collect for illumination, a seasonal collect, or an extemporaneous prayer asking for attentive hearts may precede the first reading. A brief introduction to the theme of each lesson may be offered. In order to distinguish the lesson from the commentary, the reader may announce the lesson as indicated.*

### OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

READER

*before the lesson*

Listen for the word of God in \_\_\_\_\_.

*After the lesson, a psalm may be said or sung, followed by a gloria, unless one has been said or sung earlier, or the following or a similar announcement may be made.*

READER

Here ends the Old Testament lesson.

### EPISTLE LESSON

READER

*before the lesson*

Listen for the word of God in \_\_\_\_\_.

*following the lesson*

Here ends the Epistle lesson.

## **GOSPEL LESSON**

*In some local churches, standing, by those who are able, for the reading of the Gospel is customary as it is a sign of respect for Jesus Christ, who addresses the congregation. Responses before and after this lesson may be said or sung.*

READER

*before the lesson*

Listen to the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to \_\_\_\_\_.

PEOPLE

Glory to you, O Christ.

READER

*following the lesson*

This is the good news,

PEOPLE

Praise to you, O Christ.

## **SERMON**

### **AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

*All who are able may stand for a form of the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ, a creed, or a church covenant. Forms of the statement of faith, historic creeds, and other affirmations are in the Resource Section, beginning on page 509.*

### **HYMN, ANTHEM, OR OTHER MUSIC**

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

*The people may be seated for the prayers. Leaders may announce special concerns for prayers and invite the people to indicate needs or to name causes for thanksgiving. Intercessions may include prayers for:*

- *The church universal including ecumenical councils, specific churches in other places, the United Church of Christ and its leaders, and this local church.*
- *The nations and all in authority.*
- *Justice and peace in all the world.*
- *The health of those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit.*
- *The needs of families, single people, and the lonely.*
- *Reconciliation with adversaries.*
- *The local community and all other communities.*
- *All who are oppressed or in prison.*

*A litany of prayers and responses, with silences, may be used; a pastoral prayer may be offered; petitions may be offered by anyone present, ending with a phrase to which all may respond, such as those below. A longer period of silence may precede or follow the prayers.*

A

LEADER

Christ, in your mercy,

PEOPLE

Hear our prayer.

B

LEADER

Holy Spirit, our Comforter,

PEOPLE

Receive our prayer.

### **CONCERNS OF THE CHURCH**

*Leaders and people may announce information concerning the program, ministry, and people of the church.*

### **OFFERTORY**

*A leader may introduce the offertory and give an invitation to Holy Communion, using his or her own words or one of the following.*

A

LEADER

Through Christ let us continually praise God and share what we have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

PEOPLE

Let us prepare Christ's table with the offerings of our life and labor.

B

LEADER

Let us present with joy our offerings of commitment and support for the work of Christ's church.

*Music may be offered to God's glory while the tithes and offerings are being received. Silence is also appropriate. The people may express their dedication and thanksgiving to God through music, prayers, dance, and other acts.*

*The people who are able may stand as representatives bring the gifts to the table. The communion elements may be brought to the table with the other gifts.*

A

*A doxology, such as the following to the tune "Old Hundredth," may be sung.*

ALL

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise Christ the Word in flesh born low;  
Praise Holy Spirit evermore;  
One God, Triune, whom we adore.  
Amen.

B

*This doxology may be sung. Musical settings are on pages 452 and 461.*

ALL

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Christ, all creatures here below;  
Praise Holy Spirit, the Comforter;  
One God, Triune, whom we adore. Amen.

AND

*A prayer of dedication may be said.*

*If there is to be no celebration of Holy Communion, the service may be concluded with the Prayer of Our Savior, a hymn, a benediction, and a postlude.*

### INVITATION

*While all who are able stand, a leader may use these or other words informed by scripture. The people respond.*

LEADER

Beloved in Christ, the Gospel tells us that on the first day of the week Jesus Christ was raised from death, appeared to Mary Magdalene, on that same day sat at the table with two disciples, and was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

*The people may sing or say the following. Musical settings are on pages 453 and 462.*

ALL

This is the joyful feast of the people of God. Men and women, youth and children, come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and gather about Christ's table.<sup>12</sup>

LEADER

This table is for all Christians who wish to know the presence of Christ and to share in the community of God's people.

### COMMUNION PRAYER

*All who are able may stand.*

PASTOR

God be with you.

PEOPLE

And also with you.

PASTOR

Lift up your hearts.

PEOPLE

We lift them to God.

PASTOR

Let us give thanks to God Most High.

PEOPLE

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

*The pastor leads in thankfully recalling God's great acts of salvation, using the outline on page 49 or one of these.*

A

PASTOR

We give you thanks, God of majesty and mercy, for calling forth the creation and raising us from dust by the breath of your being.

We bless you for the beauty and bounty of the earth and for the vision of the day when sharing by all will mean scarcity for none.

We remember the covenant you made with your people Israel, and we give you thanks for all our ancestors in faith. We rejoice that you call us to reconciliation with you and all people everywhere and that you remain faithful to your covenant even when we are faithless.

We rejoice that you call the entire human family to this table of sacrifice and victory. We come in remembrance and celebration of the gift of Jesus Christ, whom you sent, in the fullness of time, to be the good news. Born of Mary, our sister in faith, Christ lived among us to reveal the mystery of your Word, to suffer and die on the cross for us, to be raised from death on the third day, and then to live in glory.

*A seasonal preface from Resources for the Church Year, beginning on page 476, may be said here.*

We bless you, gracious God, for the presence of your Holy Spirit in the church you have gathered. With your sons and daughters of faith in all places and times, we praise you with joy.

B

PASTOR

We give you thanks, Holy One, almighty and eternal God, always and everywhere, through Jesus Christ, the only one begotten by you before all time, by whom you made the world and all things.

We bless you for your continual love and care for every creature. We praise you for forming us in your image and for calling us to be your people.

Although we rebelled against your love, you did not abandon us in our sin, but sent to us prophets and teachers to lead us into the way of salvation.

Above all, we give you thanks for the gift of Jesus, our only Savior, who is the way, the truth, and the life. In the fullness of time you came to us and received our nature in the person of Jesus, who, in obedience to you, by suffering on the cross, and being raised from the dead, delivered us from the way of sin and death.

We praise you that Jesus now reigns with you in glory and ever lives to pray for us.

We thank you for the Holy Spirit who leads us into truth, defends us in adversity, and gathers us from every people to unite us in one holy church.

Therefore, with the entire company of saints in heaven and on earth, we worship and glorify you, God Most Holy.

*All may sing or say the following. Musical settings are on pages 454 and 463.*

ALL

Holy, holy, holy God of love and majesty, the whole universe speaks of your glory, O God Most High. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of our God! Hosanna in the highest!

*The people may be seated as option A or B of the prayer continues. As the following words are spoken, the pastor may indicate the communion elements.*

A

PASTOR

We remember that on the night of betrayal and desertion, and on the eve of death, Jesus gathered the disciples for the feast of Passover. Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks to you, broke it, and gave it to the disciples, saying: "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."<sup>13</sup> Therefore we proclaim the mystery of our faith.

B

PASTOR

For in the night of betrayal Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks to you, broke the bread, and gave it to the disciples, and said: "Take, eat: This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also after supper, Jesus took the cup, and after giving you thanks, gave it to them and said: "Drink this, all of you: This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you and many, for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."<sup>14</sup>

*Either of these may be said or sung with option A or option B of the prayer.*

A

*Musical settings are on pages 455, 456, and 464.*

ALL

Christ's death, O God, we proclaim. Christ's resurrection we declare. Christ's coming we await. Glory be to you, O God.

B

ALL

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

*Option A or B of the prayer continues.*

A

PASTOR

Eternal God, we unite in this covenant of faith, recalling Christ's suffering and death, rejoicing in Christ's resurrection, and awaiting Christ's return in victory. We spread your table with these gifts of the earth and of our labor. We present to you our very lives, committed to your service in behalf of all people. We ask you to send your Holy Spirit on this bread and wine, on our gifts, and on us. Strengthen your universal church that it may be the champion of peace and justice in all the world. Restore the earth with your grace that is able to make all things new.

ALL

Be present with us as we share this meal, and throughout all our lives, that we may know you as the Holy One, who with Christ and the Holy Spirit, lives for ever. Amen.

B

PASTOR

Holy One, show forth among us the presence of your life-giving Word and Holy Spirit, to sanctify us and your entire church through these holy mysteries. Grant that all who share the communion of the body and blood of our risen Savior may be one in Jesus Christ. May we remain faithful in love and hope, until the perfect feast with our exalted Savior in the eternal joy of your heavenly realm.

ALL

Gracious God, accept with favor this our sacrifice of praise, which we now present with these holy gifts. We offer to you ourselves, giving you thanks for the perfect offering of the only one begotten by you, Jesus Christ our Savior: By whom and with whom and in whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory be to you, eternal God, now and for ever. Amen.

*If option A or B of the communion prayer has been used, the service continues with the Prayer of Our Savior.*

C

*The pastor, following this or a similar outline, may offer the prayer of great thanksgiving in her or his own words.*

- *Give thanks for God's goodness to us shown in the creation of the world and in the events of history.*
- *Remember people of faith through whom God has spoken to the human family as witnessed in scripture.*
- *Give thanks for the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*
- *Recall Jesus' words at the institution of the supper in the upper room.*
- *Remind us that our participation in Holy Communion is a sacrifice of praise which includes the offering of our lives to God.*
- *Briefly proclaim faith in Christ who has died, is raised, and will return at the close of history.*
- *Give thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit whose presence is invoked.*

### **PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR**

*Standing, sitting, or kneeling, all may sing or say the prayer received from Jesus Christ.*

LEADER

Let us pray as Christ our Savior has taught us.

A

ALL

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.<sup>15</sup>

B

ALL

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

C

ALL

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen

### **BREAKING BREAD AND POURING WINE**

*The bread is broken and the wine is poured as visible and audible reminders of the sacrificial self giving of Jesus Christ. These actions call to mind the cost as well as the joy of Christian discipleship.*

PASTOR

*while taking the bread and breaking it*

The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ.

PASTOR

*while pouring the wine and raising the cup*

The cup of blessing which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ.

### **LAMB OF GOD**

*Either version of the ancient Agnus Dei<sup>16</sup> may be said or sung by all*

A

ALL

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: grant us peace.

B

*Musical settings are on pages 457 and 465.*

ALL

Jesus, Lamb of God: have mercy on us. Jesus, bearer of our sins: have mercy on us. Jesus, redeemer of the world: give us your peace.

### **CALL TO THE SUPPER**

A

PASTOR

The gifts of God for the people of God. Come, for all things are ready.

B

PASTOR

The gifts of God for the people of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died and was raised for you.

### **SHARING THE ELEMENTS**

*In giving the bread and cup, the pastor and those assisting may use their own words or one of the following, and the people respond.*

A

*while giving the bread*

PASTOR

Take and eat, this is the body of Christ, broken for you.

PEOPLE

Amen!

B

*while giving the bread*

PASTOR

The body of Christ, the bread of heaven.

PEOPLE

Amen!

PASTOR

The blood of Christ, the cup of salvation.

PEOPLE

Amen!

*while giving the cup*

PASTOR

Take and drink, this is the cup of the new covenant, poured out for you.

PEOPLE

Amen!

*After the distribution of the bread and cup, the elements may be covered, according to local custom.*

*Words of dismissal may precede the prayer of thanksgiving if people have moved from their seats to receive communion.*

### **PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING**

*All who are able may stand. A leader may give thanks in her or his own words or may use one of the following.*

A

LEADER

Let us pray.

ALL

Almighty God, we give you thanks for the gift of our Savior's presence in the simplicity and splendor of this holy meal. Unite us with all who are fed by Christ's body and blood that we may faithfully proclaim the good news of your love and that your universal church may be a rainbow of hope in an uncertain world; through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

B

LEADER

Let us pray.

ALL

Bountiful God, we give you thanks that you have refreshed us at your table by granting us the presence of Christ. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth into the world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.<sup>17</sup>

### **HYMN OF PARTING**

*All who are able may stand. Depending on local custom, the commissioning and benediction, with or without the Song of Simeon, may precede the hymn.*

### **SONG OF SIMEON**

*All may sing or say the ancient Nunc Dimittis. Musical settings are on pages 458 and 466.*

ALL

Holy One, now let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled: my own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people: a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.<sup>18</sup>

### **COMMISSIONING**

*All who are able may stand as a leader says these or other words of commissioning.*

LEADER

Go forth into the world to serve God with gladness; be of good courage; hold fast to that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honor all people; love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

### **BENEDICTION**

*A leader may offer one of the following or another blessing.*

A

LEADER

The blessing of God Almighty: the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier, be with you all.

PEOPLE

Amen.

B

LEADER

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Savior Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do God's will, working in you that which is pleasing in God's sight; through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

PEOPLE  
Amen.<sup>20</sup>

## **POSTLUDE**

*The congregation may be seated and remain until the postlude is concluded.*