

RenewalWorks™ FOR ME

Growing in our understanding of Holy Eucharist:

Worship is at the heart of all we do in the Episcopal Church. We gather to be renewed in our faith and formed in our life. We take great care with worship, seeking to make it our most excellent offering. This brochure is offered to help us understand more fully what it is that we do when we celebrate the Holy Eucharist, and how it contributes to spiritual growth. It is clear from research that the eucharist is one of the key catalysts helping people move into deeper relationship with God and neighbor, in other words, helping people grow spiritually.

Much has been written over the centuries about the meaning of the eucharist, and what happens in this mysterious, holy meal. At its heart, it is a gathering to offer thanksgiving (the word eucharist really means thanksgiving). As the community gathers to be fed by bread and wine, Christians receive strength for the spiritual journey. Growth happens as people are fed.

In the Episcopal Church, we claim the Holy Eucharist is our principal act of worship. The Book of Common Prayer provides a variety of ways to celebrate this sacrament, with Rite I and Rite II language (traditional and contemporary), and a variety of prayers to choose from, as bread and wine are consecrated and Christ's presence is realized in our midst. But as we look at these various prayers, we realize that the core of the service is the same. There are several movements through the service, common to all of the prayers. We outline these movements in this brochure, with thanks to the Rev. Carol Anderson, former Rector of All Saints, Beverly Hills, who has shared with us this particular way of understanding what happens in the eucharist.

Preparation for worship:

Experience of worship is enriched by intentional preparation for the gathering. Some suggestions:

- **Focus on Sunday worship during the week** as the center point of your week. Look forward to it. Read the lessons for the coming Sunday. And use the brochure “Prayers in preparation for the Sunday Celebration of the Holy Eucharist” available on the RenewalWorks website (www.renewalworks.org).
- **Arrive early at church** for a time of quiet preparation before worship. We are coming before the living God so we need not arrive breathless or late for that meeting. We need time to become aware of God’s presence and of each other, to calm the “monkey-mind”, to put away the to-do list for a short while. Use the prayers on pages 833-841 in The Book of Common Prayer as preparation.
- **Remember that we are not meant to be either passive or solitary in worship.** As Soren Kierkegaard has written, “Worship is a drama: the congregation are the players, the clergy and musicians are the prompters and God is the audience.” The drama is about how God has been revealed to us and our response to that revelation.

There are four parts to this drama:

Part One: Prepare to hear the story.

Part Two: Hear the story

Part Three: Act out the story

Part Four: Go forth with the story

Questions for reflection:

1. How do you prepare for worship on Sundays?

2. What do you think of Kierkegaard's description of worship? Does it lead you to change the way you think about church?
3. Is there some new way you might try to prepare in the next 40 days?

Part one: Prepare to hear the story

- **The Prelude** is a musical offering that enables preparation for worship. Musicians work hard to make this their most excellent offering, to help people prepare for worship. Savor this opportunity to get ready. Honor their offering. Prepare to encounter the Holy One.
- **The Processional Hymn** further prepares us for worship. The procession during the hymn symbolizes that the entire congregation actively comes before God. See if you can detect a theme in selection of hymns, corresponding to the readings for the day or the themes of the season.
- **Call to worship:** "Blessed be God..." is an ancient greeting, beginning the time of our corporate worship and focusing our attention not on ourselves but on the one we worship. There are other opening acclamations, appropriate to different seasons (Lent and Easter) which help to mark those seasons.
- **The Collect for Purity:** This prayer asks that we may come before God with a pure desire to worship God, asking God to cleanse our hearts, our wills and our being so we can give God our whole attention. We always need God's help, even to worship.
- **The Hymn of Praise:** This can be a hymn chosen from the hymnal, or the Gloria or the Kyrie (Lord have mercy). These help us remember and recognize who God is.
- **The Collect of the Day:** This is a "summing up" prayer that sets the theme of the season or day. You can find the collects in the Prayer Book (pages 159-261) if you wish to look them up ahead of time.

Questions for reflection:

1. What part do the hymns play for you in the service. Consider getting to church a bit early, find out what hymns you'll be singing in the service, and read the hymn text. Often there are great lessons there.

2. When we offer praise to God, or say “Blessed be God”, why do we do that? What does it say about God? What does it say about us?

Part Two: Hear the story: The Word of God

- **The Lessons**, either 2 or 3 readings from the Bible, following the liturgical season and a 3 year schedule for Sundays (the lectionary) which can be found on pages 889-921 of the Prayer Book. These readings tell how, throughout history, God has been revealed and how people have responded. In other words, it’s a story of relationship. These readings are not simply a preliminary to preaching. It is God speaking to us in the present, here today. Again, if you can spend some time during the week reflecting on these passages, your worship experience will be enhanced.
- **Psalms and/or Sequence Hymn** expand on the readings, and can help us better understand God’s Word.
- **The Reading of the Gospel**
 - **The Gospel Procession:** The gospel reading holds a special place, distinct from other readings because it tells the story of Jesus and our redemption. Accordingly, we bring the gospel book to the center of the people.
 - **The Signing of the Gospel:** Many people make the sign of the cross on forehead, lips and heart. We ask that the Word may be in our minds, on our lips and in our hearts.
- **The Sermon:** This is meant to apply the Word just heard to our lives. It often concludes with what we call the “so-what” factor, exploring the difference the gospel makes in our lives.
- **The Nicene Creed:** Here we say what we believe, in language crafted in the 4th century. It is a sign of our unity. It is a sign of where we give our heart. We may not understand it all, but when we say “We believe...” we join with Christians around the world and across the generations.
- **The Prayers of the People:** Having heard God’s promises and love for us in the Word, we come before God with our needs and the needs of the world. The prayers are usually led by a lay person, underscoring the wisdom reflected in the Prayer Book which says that all of us are ministers in the church. We have several different forms that we use.

Many churches craft their own versions, careful to cover a number of topics (the world, the church, those in need, etc.)

- **The Confession:** Rooted in an awareness of God's love and forgiveness, we honestly confess our sins to God, captured in the phrase "We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves." On some level, that's true every day of our lives.
- **The Absolution:** The priest (or bishop if present) pronounces the forgiveness of sins, not in his/her name, but in God's name. Thus, having reconciled with God, we exchange the Peace.
- **The Peace:** It celebrates our forgiveness by God and symbolizes our reconciliation with one another. It is not so much a time to chat, make fashion commentary or reflect on scores of yesterday's game, but to offer God's peace to one another. It is a sign that we are prepared to move on to the Liturgy of the Table, part three, where we act out the story.

Questions for reflection:

1. When you hear the readings from scripture in church on Sunday, do you ever find yourself confused, or not knowing what they're about?
2. Can you try some way to prepare for Sunday by looking at the readings ahead of time?
3. What makes for a good sermon?
4. How do you feel about saying the Creed? Do you think it's an important part of the service?

Part Three: Acting out the story

The Offertory:

- **Offerings of money are gathered** as an acknowledgement of God's sovereignty over the world and over our lives. We give of what God has given to us, and it is shared with the needy and for the sake of our local church ministry.
- **The bread and wine are presented** because they were used by Jesus at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:26-29). Water is also used, symbolizing both the water that flowed from the side of Jesus on the cross, and as the sign of our baptism.

- **The Offertory Anthem:** This is not background music. It is a musical offering of praise by the music ministers and on behalf of the congregation.
- **The Offertory Procession:** We present tithes (money), bread and wine, representing the offering of our lives to be made holy (sanctified) for God's use.
- **A Presentation Hymn** may also be sung as our offerings are presented at the altar.

The Holy Communion:

We stand or kneel according to our desire. Standing denotes our attitude of praise or thanksgiving, kneeling our reverence.

- **The Great Thanksgiving:** This begins our thanksgiving meal together. What we have done so far gets us ready for when we share bread and wine together. Jesus first showed us how to do this, and he promised that he would be present whenever we share this special meal. (Mark 14:22-24, I Corinthians 1:23-26). The word communion comes from the same root as community. We are the Lord's community communing together around his meal.
- **The Acclamation:** "The Lord be with you..."
- **The Sursum Corda:** This is Latin for "lift up your hearts", an old Jewish table blessing. Again, it is a dialogue meant to draw us all into participation.
- **Proper Preface:** A seasonal or thematic beginning of the prayer, leading to the Sanctus. Listen for the preface and see what it says about God and us.
- **The Sanctus:** It means "holy" and so we say or sing together a hymn that begins: "Holy, holy..." It comes from Isaiah's vision of heaven (Isaiah 6:1-8) and the song sung in God's presence from Revelation 4 and 5.
- **The Eucharistic Prayer:** There are two of these in Rite I language (Prayer I and II) and four of these in Rite II language (Prayers A, B, C and D), as well as a shortened version for special occasions. They have many things in common. They call us to remember the history of what God has done for us, especially on the night of the Last Supper. In all these prayers, the celebrant asks the Holy Spirit to make the bread and wine holy, to

represent the body and blood of Jesus. This is what we mean when we say that the bread and wine are consecrated. We believe that as we eat the bread and drink the wine, we are experiencing the story of the resurrection as if we are really there. This enables us to share in the new life that Jesus brings to us by his dying and rising again.

- **The Memorial Acclamation:** “Christ has died...” or “We remember his death...”. These are proclaimed strongly as an affirmation of our faith.
- **AMEN:** Called the Great Amen. This is in bold caps because it is also proclaimed, nearly shouted by the congregation. It is our agreement with what has been said.
- **The Lord’s Prayer:** This is the prayer taught by Jesus, found in every liturgy in the Prayer Book. We say it in unity with him (Matthew 6:9-15). The communion is the answer to the words: “Give us this day our daily bread.”
- **The Fraction or the Breaking of the Bread:** Jesus took the bread at the Last Supper. He blessed and broke it. We break the bread as a symbol of his death on the cross for us. The words of fraction may be sung here, to acknowledge the solemnity of the moment.
- **The Invitation:** “The gifts of God...” This is an invitation to all, to come to the meal that Christ has prepared for us. We come in remembrance and gratitude for his great gift of his life, death and resurrection.
- **The Communion of the People:** We get out of our seats (as able) to go forward to receive the bread and wine which is our saying “yes” to all Jesus has done for us, confessing that we cannot live by bread alone, but need the Lord. This is affirmed when we say “Amen” after receiving the bread and wine.
- **The Communion Hymn:** Often a hymn is sung as people receive communion. All are invited to sing, and to use music and text as a prayer, knowing that the person who sings prays twice.

Questions for reflection:

1. Why do we include collection of money in a service like this?
2. When you hear the prayer over the bread and wine, can you listen for what God has done in the story?
3. Why do you think we say the Lord’s Prayer so much? Are there lines of that prayer that are particularly meaningful for you?

Part Four: Going forth with the story

- **The Post Communion Prayer:** This is our saying “thank you” for what God has given us, and praying for strength and courage to do the work God has for us in the world. Leaving before this prayer is said is like leaving a dinner party without thanking the host. Note that the word courage suggests not only bravery but also heart.
- **The Blessing:** This is done by a bishop when present, or a priest, and it confers God’s blessing on those gathered. It is trinitarian in form, and we can make the sign of the cross here.
- **The Recessional Hymn:** Just as the Processional Hymn invites us to worship, this hymn summarizes our time with God. The procession out of the nave symbolizes the entire congregation, being sent forth to do God’s work in the world.
- **The Dismissal:** One could argue that this is the most important part of the service. We are sent forth into the world to do the work of the kingdom. It hearkens back to the Great Commission of Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20). We have gathered as a community, we have worshipped, we are reconciled, forgiven, and healed, we are empowered, now we go. We respond to whatever is said at the dismissal with the words: “Thanks be to God.” We cannot keep the gospel to ourselves. We are excited about sharing what we know. We are thankful that we are sent out empowered to minister. One church put a sign over the exit, a sign which people could see as they departed. It read: The worship is over. The service begins.
- **The Postlude:** A seasonally appropriate musical conclusion designed to send us into the world to “love and serve the Lord.”

Questions for reflection:

1. Why are the words “strength and courage’ included in one of the post-communion prayers?
2. What do you think about the idea that the dismissal may be the most important part of the service?
3. How do you usually feel when the service is over? Better than when you arrived? The same? Worse?

In summation, a few more things to think about:

- Which parts of the service are most meaningful to you? Which parts are confusing?
- If you could ask a priest or a religious scholar a question about the eucharist, what would that question be? How will you go about finding an answer?