

# WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT?

## A General Orientation to Life at Trinity Church

***There's a lot that goes on in the life of a church, and it can all be a bit bewildering for newcomers. We hope it will be helpful to share with you the big picture of our goals and emphases here at Trinity Church. There are lots of details we could mention, but the basics of our congregational life are actually fairly simple.***

### A Biblical Foundation

It all begins with the God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – who reveals Himself to us in the Bible. We are a community of faith, a community of *believers*: we believe God when He tells us that His Word is true, without error, and fully trustworthy; we believe that everything He says is profitable for instructing us, reproving and correcting us, and training us in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). Our life together revolves without apology around His Word. It is our final authority for belief and practice. It is the light under which we cheerfully live.

### A Gracious Story

The heart of the Bible is the story of God's grace to the world in Jesus Christ. As believers, we love this story. We love God's grace, and we want to be a grace-filled church. We want God's grace in Jesus Christ to shape the way we read the Bible – after all, Jesus did say the whole Bible is about Him (see Luke 24:25–27, 44–47)! We want God's grace in Jesus to shape the way we live. It's no small thing to have been saved from sin and death through the death and resurrection of God's Son, to have been made children of God and citizens of His kingdom – and we want to *act* like the people God has told us we *are*, not only in our relationship with Him, but also in our relationships with each other and with the world.

### A Worshipful Response

Our response to the God who reveals Himself in the Bible is worship. Worshiping Him is the center of our lives; it is the source from which everything else in life flows. We seek to enjoy the best of the ancient traditions of Christian worship, learning from the reverence of our fathers; and we seek to do so vibrantly, with lively enthusiasm, for God is the God of the living, not the dead! We look forward to hearing His Word read and preached in the power of the Holy Spirit, and we rejoice in the climax of worship at His Table every week. For us, there is no worship that does not end in this joyful fellowship of thanksgiving.

### A Sharing Community

Out of worshiping God flows our life in community. We're under no delusions about how hard it is to share life together as God's people in the modern world, but we are determined to pursue full obedience to our

Lord's command, "Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality" (Romans 12:13). Because we worship together at the feet of one Lord in the bonds of one Spirit, one faith, and one baptism, we can eat and drink, work and play, weep and laugh, struggle and study in the presence of God and each other; and in this way we hope to reach unity in the faith and in knowing God's Son – to reach maturity, the full stature of Christ (Ephesians 4:1ff).

### A Thousand Generations

Out of this life in community around God's Word will flow, according to His sure promise, a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments. We are a generational church: we worship together as families; we learn together as families; we take seriously the callings of father, mother, parent, child, and sibling. We aim at nothing less than the fulfillment of God's promise that His Spirit which is upon us, and His words that He has put in our mouths, will be in the mouths of our offspring and their offspring after them, from now to eternity (Isaiah 59:21); and we seek to embrace all the duties this promise imposes on us.

### An Outgoing Witness

It is our calling and privilege to take this life in community under God's Word to the streets and neighborhoods of our world. It begins next door to every one of us. By the way we live in the world, by the way we act toward those we meet every day, we bear the light of Christ and lift Him up, with confidence that He will draw the poor and needy to Himself.

***Since this all begins with worshiping the God who reveals Himself in the Bible, in the following sections we'll introduce you to the form of worship we practice here at Trinity Church. . . .***



# WHY DO WE WORSHIP LIKE THIS?

## Deep Realities That Shape Our Order of Service

**Hebrews 12:22** addresses the New Covenant church, assembled in worship, with these words: **“You have come to Mount Zion.”** It’s hard to imagine a more awesome description! The church, in its act of corporate worship, is assembled before God no less surely than Israel was at Sinai, but more gloriously – because here there’s not an atmosphere of tempest and terror, but rather one of grace and free access through the mediator at God’s right hand, Jesus Christ. And this coming to Mount Zion, this approach to God through the mediator, is what occurs every time the New Covenant church assembles for worship. Do we actually believe this?

If we do, then it should be perfectly obvious that nothing is more central or important in our lives than our assemblies of worship. We’re meeting with God here! And it’s simply impossible to meet with God and walk away unchanged. What happens in our worship will necessarily leave its mark on everything else in our lives. This also means that the “shape” (or form, what we call the “liturgy”) of our worship matters. We need to study the Bible to learn what meetings between God and His people look like – and then we need to arrange our meetings so they look like what the Bible describes. As Michael Goheen has said,

The Bible must narrate the world for the Christian community, and corporate worship is the primary place this will happen. The way the worship is structured, the hymns that are chosen, the way various elements are introduced and related to one another, the way the gospel is preached all can focus our attention on the story of God’s mighty deeds – past, present, and future – in which we find our place. (*A Light To the Nations*, p. 203)

What we find in the Bible is that God’s meetings with His people are always *covenant* affairs: God is with His people, He comes into their midst and dwells with them in grace despite their sinfulness, because He has made a covenant with them. Our gatherings of worship are times of renewing this covenant. We might even say worship *reenacts* God’s making covenant with His people – a bit like a renewal of marriage vows between a husband and wife.

When God covenants with people in the Bible, we usually see five things: (1) He calls them or otherwise takes hold of them, (2) He sets them apart and cleanses away their impurities, (3) He speaks to them His promises and commands, (4) He gives them some kind of visible sign of His love-bond with them, and (5) He makes future arrangements with them (and with their offspring after them).

That’s why our worship service is structured around five elements: God *calls* us, *cleanses* us, *consecrates* us by speaking His Word to us, *communes* with us at His Table, and *commissions* us to go out and be His salt and light in the world. The middle three elements (cleansing, consecration, and communion) also follow the order of sacrifices God instituted through Moses: there was a *sin offering* to take away the sin of the worshiper (e.g., Leviticus 9:8), a *burnt offering* representing consecration of the worshiper’s whole life (Leviticus 9:12), and lastly a *peace offering* eaten by both God and worshiper as a meal of covenant friendship (Leviticus 9:18). The basic movement of worship in this sacrificial order can still instruct us today, even now that Jesus has offered the once-for-all sacrifice that brings us back to God (Hebrews 10:1–14).

Throughout the biblical meetings of God with His people, we also see *dialogue*. God speaks, obviously (calling, pronouncing pardon, proclaiming His law and gospel, blessing, commissioning, etc.), but His people also respond (in prayer, confession, songs of praise, eating and drinking what He provides, etc.). What is very obvious throughout scripture is that worship is not a spectator sport! While the primary direction of service is from God to His people, they also serve Him responsively and actively – no one is sitting on the sidelines and watching! We have tried to structure our worship in such a way that not only all of us are involved, but also the whole of each one of us is involved, body as well as soul. This is why we strongly emphasize postures such as kneeling and raising of hands.

It also shouldn’t be overlooked that biblical worship is *celebratory*. The Psalms fairly shout for joy in the Lord, and in the Gospels and Epistles the responses of God’s people to the long-awaited arrival of Messiah overflow with gladness and confident hope. Certainly this is a note we want to sound prominently in all our assemblies.



# WHY'S THAT IN THE BULLETIN?

## A Few “Annotations” on Our Trinity Church Liturgy

### Proclamation of God's Name

#### **“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”**

This reminds us that we worship the Triune God – Father, Son, and Spirit – and identifies our worship from the very outset as Christian worship.

### The Corporate “Amen”

The congregational **“amen”** after the proclamation, and throughout the liturgy, should be spoken loudly and energetically. We recall these words from Shorter Catechism 107: “in testimony of our desire, and assurance to be heard, we say, Amen.”

### The Pastoral Greeting and Response

#### **“The Lord be with you” / “And also with you”**

This beautiful exchange dates back at least to the Apostolic Constitutions of the late 3rd or early 4th century. It reminds us of the greeting of faithful Boaz to his reapers (Ruth 2:4) and is based on biblical texts such as Galatians 6:18, 2 Timothy 4:22, and Philemon 25.

### The Votum

#### **“Our help is in the name of the Lord . . .”**

This is a direct quote from Psalm 124:8, and reminds us that we cannot worship God acceptably unless He Himself enables us to do so.

### The Corporate “Thanks be to God”

The verbal response here and after the readings of scripture is only fitting in view of our Lord's declaration of pardon and His speaking His good Word to us; like the corporate “amen” it should be spoken loudly and energetically.

### The Sursum Corda

#### **“Lift up your hearts” / “We lift them up to the Lord”**

This beautiful exchange dates back at least to the time of Cyprian of Carthage (A.D. 252). Those familiar with the work of John Calvin will recognize that it expresses a central concept in his theology and liturgy. It is also deeply biblical (e.g., Psalm 25:1) and appropriate as, cleansed from sin, we begin our ascent up Mount Zion to worship our God (Hebrews 12:18–24).

### The Sanctus

An allusion to this anthem appears as early as the letter of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians (A.D. 96). It is a musical setting based on biblical passages such as Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8.

### The Gloria Patri

This hymn is based on biblical texts such as Romans 16:27, Ephesians 3:21, Philippians 4:20, and Revelation 1:6.

### The Lifting of Hands

*(during the Doxology, the Lord's Prayer, and the benediction)*

Lifting of hands is a biblical posture for prayer and praise (e.g., Nehemiah 8:6; Psalm 28:2; 63:4; 119:48; 134:2; 141:2; 143:6; 1 Timothy 2:8). It represents the uplifting of our hearts and whole lives to our God in heaven (Lamentations 3:41). We encourage you to join us in this act of worship, as you are comfortable.

### The Nunc Dimittis

This is a beautiful biblical prayer, based on Luke 2:29–32 (“now You are letting Your servant depart”), for God to dismiss us in peace, in His *shalom*.



# WHY IS THE PASTOR WEARING A ROBE?

## Some Thoughts on Pastoral Attire

Since the traditional preaching gown is a bit “outside the box” for many of us, we will consider here a few reasons why the elders at Trinity have decided that our pastor should wear one in worship.

### *Distinctive clothing identifies a distinctive office*

There are people who like to wear uniforms because it makes them feel important. This has no place in pastoral ministry: a pastor who wants to wear a robe because he likes to lord it over others is in the grip of serious sin! The apostle Paul says, “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ” (1 Corinthians 4:1) – servants, not lords!

At the same time, Paul says “one should regard us [as] stewards of the mysteries of God.” This means that while the pastor’s work is that of a servant, his office is holy: he is called by Christ to watch over and administer the mysteries of God (notably His Word and sacraments) in His name. That is why pastors in our denomination are formally trained, and ordained, and why they alone may preach and administer sacraments. Not every Christian is called, equipped, and set apart by Christ to official stewardship of God’s mysteries.

One purpose of the ministerial robe, then, is to remind participants in worship, including the minister, that in worship he represents the Great Shepherd to His sheep, serving them in God’s name – and it is fitting that his attire reflect the uniqueness of his work. The robe conceals all but his hands and head, deflecting attention from him to the One in whose name he blesses, feeds, and instructs the flock.

### *Clothing makes a cultural connection*

Identifying a pastor by his clothes has a flip side. Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, all clothing identifies the wearer’s culture and his or her status within the culture. If you want to identify with a culture, you should at least start wearing its clothes. That’s why a minister who wants to identify with a particular culture, or slice of culture, often adopts the dress style of that culture (bikers, hippies, rappers, yuppies, academics, etc.). And while this may be fine in everyday life, it can actually be quite dangerous in worship – a pastor’s attire may quietly (or not so quietly!) say to those who enter worship, “If you want to fit in here, this is the standard.” Should a pastor in worship really be identifying with a particular culture or status? Should he dress like a hippie, a biker, a rapper, or a businessman (whether of the 1950s or the 21st century variety)? Should worshipers feel they must dress up to his level, or down to it? Should they be distracted by his taste or lack thereof?

Obviously, a minister always bears some marks of his culture – he can’t open his mouth without displaying these, and scripture does not condemn him for it. But an advantage of the preaching robe is that it predates all modern sartorial fads, it has been used across multiple cultures and in many nations, and it gives not the slightest hint of economic or social status. It is simple, and it keeps the focus where the focus needs to be – on the gospel, not cufflinks or a bone chain, or the pious shabbiness of an out-of-date suit.

### *The preaching robe is a venerable church practice*

This is not the most important reason, but it matters. Most of the church prior to the last two centuries would have simply laughed at the idea of a pastor dressing for the crowd; and they wouldn’t have understood his appealing to “the traditional look” any more than a “contemporary look.” Ministerial attire was neither traditional nor contemporary – it was a robe! This was true not only before and during but also after the Reformation, even among those who most vehemently denounced clerical pretensions (e.g., the Westminster divines and Scottish Presbyterians). The fact that many Reformed ministers today do not wear robes (though many do) is a very poor index of historic church practice, and one must ask if this does not have more to do with recent cultural and ecclesiastical trends than with faithfulness to scripture or Reformed tradition. The reaction of many to the preaching robe is that it looks Roman Catholic – as if distinctive ministerial attire is in any sense a product of Rome! The Reformers, at least, would have disagreed with such a reaction; and it’s important for us to think through the constructive reasons for their consistent use of the preaching robe.



## WHY DO WE DISTRIBUTE THE COMMUNION ELEMENTS BY HOUSEHOLD?

The Bible tells us that the corporate worship of God's people is a time in which they meet with Him, entering His very presence with singing and His courts with praise. But there's something else in scripture that doesn't always get the attention it should: God meets with His people not only as a gathering of individuals, but also as a gathering of *households*. This was visibly true in Israel of old: the tribes camped around God's tabernacle "each by his own standard, with the banners of their father's houses" (Numbers 2:2). After the ascension of Jesus and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, saints were added to the church by household (e.g., Acts 16:15, 33; 1 Corinthians 1:16), and were addressed in public worship not only as individuals but also as household members (Ephesians 5:22–6:9; Colossians 3:18–4:1). This being so, we've asked ourselves, "Does anything in our liturgy reflect this household principle – that God meets with His church as a gathering of households?"

One place where it seems quite natural to emphasize the household principle is the Lord's Supper. After all, eating is a family affair! It is true that the church as a whole is one family; it's no less true that the church communes together as a family of families. We might also recall that the Old Covenant "shadow" of the Lord's Supper, the Passover, was eaten by household (Exodus 12:3ff), which is an important precedent.

We believe it is unto edification, then, to distribute the elements of the Lord's Supper to heads of households, including individuals who represent single-person households. Each will then carry the elements of the Supper from the communion table to the members of his (or, in some cases, her) family.

Proceeding in this direction, we have had to consider two possible areas of concern. The first is how to define a "household"! For the sake of simplicity, we believe a household includes children living more or less under the roof (including those at college who return home after studies); and, of course, an adult living independently as a single would constitute a single-person household.

The second concern is more substantive. Our *Confession of Faith* says clearly that the sacraments may not "be dispensed by any, but by a minister of the gospel lawfully ordained" (WCF 27.4). This is supported by the following provisions in our *Directory for Public Worship*: ruling elders "may not . . . administer the sacraments" (DPW I.D.2.d); the sacraments "are not to be administered by any private person, but only by a minister of the Word" (DPW II.A.4.c); and a minister is to "break the bread and give it to the people" (so with distributing the cup, DPW III.C.6; cf. *Larger Catechism* 176).

We believe distribution of the communion elements by a minister to heads of households, and conveyance of the elements by these to their family members, is fully in accord with scripture and with our constitutional standards, both in letter and in spirit. We see no real difference between (a) the minister handing the elements to heads of households and (b) his handing them to elders/deacons who then hand them to those sitting at the end of each pew (as is done in many Reformed churches). In neither case is the minister personally distributing the elements to every communicant. Yet the essential thing is present in both scenarios: the minister officially dispenses the elements, both directly and representatively through those who aid him in distributing the bread and the cup.

In the interest of being orderly and clear, we recall that the keys of our Lord's kingdom have been committed to the officers of His church (WCF 30.2), not to heads of Christian households. It is not within the power of the head of a household to admit members of his household to the Lord's Table, or to exclude them from it. He may apportion the elements only to such members as have been admitted to the Table by the elders of the church.

R. L. Dabney once wrote, "Legislators speak of the well-ordered family as the integer of which the prosperous commonwealth is formed. But God assigns the family a far higher and holier aim. The Christian family is the constituent integer of the church – the kingdom of redemption." We celebrate this truth, and look forward to doing so even more tangibly at the Lord's Supper!

