



Seeds for the Parish

RESOURCE PAPER FOR LEADERS OF ELCA CONGREGATIONS

compiled from *Seeds for the Parish*
November-December 2000 — March-April 2002

Consider this ... **suggestions for liturgical planning**

In its November-December 2000 issue, *Seeds for the Parish* introduced a new column called “*Consider this ... suggestions for liturgical planning.*” Since then the column has looked at the ways ELCA congregations are discovering the diverse riches that are available within the liturgy. In *Consider this*, those who are responsible for planning and leading worship are invited to consider some alternatives to their current practice in an effort to heighten the meaning of liturgical actions for the worshipers. The idea is to help worship planners consider different ways of doing things to enrich the worship in their own congregations.



Lifting up Jesus Christ: Yesterday, Today, and Forever

Here is the content of the first eight issues of *Consider this*. In these issues, we look specifically at the parts that make up the liturgy.

The ELCA’s official statement on the practice of Word and Sacrament, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, is the foundation for all of these suggestions. You can find this document at www.elca.org/dcm/worship/sacpracst.html. For further information contact Scott Weidler, Associate Director for Worship and Music via e-mail at sweidler@elca.org.

The Gathering

If your current practice is ...

To assume that silence is understood and valued as a way of preparing for worship.

Gathering in silence, but there is really more talk than silence.

The Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness from LBW is used before every communion service.

Consider this ...

Teach about silence. Have retreats and classes and articles and “practice times” to learn how to keep a productive silence.

Begin singing, hymns, praise songs, Taizé refrains (think about the atmosphere you’re creating) about 15 minutes before the service, then keep an intentional period of silence before the worship continues.

For some seasons, consider using an alternative text, such as those in Sundays and Seasons. Confession can be expressed and forgiveness proclaimed in many ways, especially through petitions during the prayers and in Holy Communion itself. It is not necessary to use the brief order before every service.

There is always an entrance hymn.

Consider having the Kyrie serve as the entrance music, in lieu of a hymn, during Advent or Lent. The radically different style can be effective. “This is the Feast” and “Glory to God” are also excellent processional hymns in appropriate seasons.

Processions always go from the back of the church to the front.

Processions can be a way of symbolizing that we are on a journey, led by the cross of Christ, and not just a functional way to get to leaders into the worship space. Consider some seasonal variations. Lenten processions could be simple and come from the side door. Festive processions, especially on a day like Passion (Palm) Sunday, the entire assembly could process around the exterior or interior of the church. On some occasions, a functional procession may be all that’s needed. In that case, don’t create something that isn’t – leaders should just move reverently to their place.

The WORD

If your current practice is:

Readings are done from a lectern and the sermon is preached from a pulpit.

Consider this:

Use one place for the Word, from which the readings are proclaimed and the sermon is preached. This provides a visually powerful symbol of the unity of God’s Word and clear liturgical focus. If, for architectural reasons, two places remain, use the more prominent for the readings and sermon and reserve the smaller for the prayers, announcements and other liturgical elements not directly related to the Word or Meal.

There are no candles by the reading stand.

In worship, candles are often used to flank the place where important things happen. There are two focal points to the Sunday liturgy: Word and Sacrament (and, on occasion, Baptism). If there are candles at the altar, there should also be some at the place of the Word. They could be moved from one location to the other at the Offertory to visually show a shift in focus.

Scripture is read from a small book or insert.

Lutherans boldly proclaim the strength and importance of the Word of God. This is not expressed well when the public reading of scripture is done from a small book or flimsy sheets of paper. A large bible or the ritual edition of the lectionary are much clearer symbols. They are also easier to read from.

Readings are always read by a pastor.

Lay persons are encouraged to read the first and second lessons. They may be vested and in the chancel or they may come forward from the congregation in street clothes.

Readings are printed out for the congregation.

Train the readers so well that the Word is proclaimed clearly and loudly, allowing worshipers to encounter God's Word proclaimed differently than they would in an education setting.

Readings are introduced with complete references.

Complete references are available in the bulletin or elsewhere. They need not be spoken out loud. Rather the reading should be introduced simply and boldly, "A reading from Jeremiah." In a sense we're saying, "Pay attention! God has something to say through Jeremiah. Listen!" Remember that the reading is not "found in" (it wasn't lost) or "taken from" (it's still there) any book of the Bible.

Readings are concluded without the opportunity for congregational acclamation.

Give the congregation the chance to offer their acclamation to the reading from scripture. At the conclusion of a reading, pause, look up at the congregation and say, "The Word of the Lord." Teach them to respond boldly, "Thanks be to God." This simple response is easily learned by everyone and is an excellent way to help keep children involved in the liturgy. This response is common in many denominations. Using it may be a hospitable gesture to visitors from other churches.

The lectionary is ignored in favor of more relevant scripture readings, often to allow for a sermon "series."

When left to the personal preferences of preachers or worship planners, the scripture used in worship would be severely limited. The lectionary disciplines preachers and musicians to grapple with some tough portions of scripture and is a powerful way of connecting us with Christians throughout the whole Church. There is always a relevant message for contemporary worshipers in every biblical reading. Investigate the lectionary. Many "series" of topics are already in place.

The psalm is omitted.

The psalms are a valuable resource that need to be rediscovered. It's worth several minutes to include the singing of a psalm. If it is skipped and the first two readings are read back to back, the natural and ancient rhythm of reading-singing-reading-singing is lost.

The psalm is spoken.

The psalms are literally a songbook. While there is nothing wrong with speaking the text (imagine speaking a hymn text) the inherent quality is lost. The simplest methods of singing the psalms are more easily demonstrated than explained. If unsure how to do this, investigate other congregations in your synod that are doing it and ask for assistance.

The Gospel Acclamation from *LBW* (“Alleluia. Lord to whom . . .”) is sung each week.

The alleluia and verse printed in *LBW* is meant to be a last resort. The preference is to have a cantor or choir sing a verse specific to the day. *Indexes for Worship Planning* and the Leader’s Edition of *With One Voice* list the verses appointed for each day, and are available in musical settings from various publishers. Inviting the congregation to sing a refrain of alleluias (perhaps very familiar) before and after the verse (sung to a simple tone) adds another element of simple and easily-learned participation by the people, with no expense. See the Worship Q & A at www.elca.org/dcm/worship/qa/createlitmusic.html for information on how to do this simply and for free!

The gospel is always read from the ambo or pulpit.

Processing the scriptures to the middle of the assembly for the proclamation of the gospel reading can be a powerful symbol of God coming among the people through Jesus Christ.

The hymn following (or prior to) the sermon is called the Sermon Hymn.

Lutheran understanding of this hymn is that it is a vehicle for the proclamation of God’s Word, not merely a reaction or response to the sermon. Therefore, it is called the Hymn of the Day and should relate to all the readings, the entire liturgy, and the season, not just the sermon.

The intercessory prayers are borrowed from a print resource and are led by the pastor.

Intercessory prayer is rightly crafted for the needs and concerns of each particular community. Examples from other sources can be helpful in crafting petitions, but should never preempt local prayers. In some traditions, these particular prayers are called the Prayers of the People. The community is to be led in intercessory prayer by a lay representative of the community. Ideally, a lay person will also write the prayers. Pastoral oversight needs to be carefully exercised to train and support those who write and publicly lead prayers.

The MEAL

If your current practice is:

Communion is not celebrated each Sunday.

The passing of the peace is a friendly time of greeting and conversation.

The offering received is primarily monetary.

The altar guild puts the bread on the altar before the service.

As the gifts are presented, the congregation always sings either “Let the vineyard” or “What shall I render.”

The only offertory prayers used are “Merciful Father” or “Blessed are you” as printed in the *LBW*.

The look on worshipers' faces communicate that communion is understood as a command to be obeyed for the forgiveness of sins.

All children commune for the first time at the same age or after completing a class.

The pastor is alone at the altar and does all the **A** (assisting minister) and **P** (presiding minister) parts of the liturgy.

Consider this:

Following the witness of the early church, the Lutheran confessions, and the ELCA statement on sacramental practices, let every Sunday and festival liturgy include both Word and Holy Communion.

Using Scripture as a guide, help the congregation to understand this time in the liturgy as a sharing of God’s peace.

Enlarge the vision of the offering to include gifts of food, blankets, clothes, and whatever else may be needed for the poor or missions. This may mean a new vision of how the offering is received, perhaps a procession of the entire congregation placing gifts before the altar.

Bread, a symbol of our daily work, and wine, a symbol of great joy—both to be used by God in holy communion—can be presented along with other gifts.

Accompany the presentation of the gifts with a few stanzas of an appropriate hymn or other music.

Consider occasional use of a seasonal prayer. Use prayers, such as those in *Sundays and Seasons*, for many weeks so they become familiar and natural.

Encourage worshipers to understand communion as an invitation to feast at God's eternal banquet, joyfully celebrating that we are forgiven and united with God and one another.

Offer communion to all the baptized regardless of age. Children are “ready” at different times in their development and should be prepared individually by pastors and their parents (See “The Use of the Means of Grace,” principles 37 and 38 at www.elca.org/dcm/worship/sacpracst.html).

Laypersons should serve as assisting ministers (**A** parts) especially leading the offertory prayer, assisting at the altar during the Great Thanksgiving, serving Communion, and speaking the prayer after Communion.

The same musical setting is sung every week or a different musical setting is sung each week.

Following the “Holy, holy,” only the words of institution or the shortened option are used.

The only eucharistic prayer used is the text in the *LBW* pew edition.

The “traditional” Lord’s Prayer is always prayed.

Grape juice or dealcoholized wine is used for the entire congregation.

Red wine is always used.

Small glasses, filled with wine before the service, and/or individual wafers are use.

Select liturgical music to be used seasonally. This allows for some variety, but gives the congregation a chance to internalize the music and participate fully and naturally.

Learn the joy and delight in regularly recalling salvation history and discovering our place in it by using a full eucharistic prayer. It takes less than ninety seconds to pray even the lengthiest prayers. If time is a problem, trim back on the gathering rite and announcements, or develop more efficient offering and communion procedures. The *With One Voice Leader’s Edition* has seasonal prayers that are complete, beautiful and brief.

The *LBW Minister’s Desk Edition* and the *With One Voice Leader’s Edition* contain numerous other prayers. They vary in length and exact content, but all contain the essential elements of a eucharistic prayer as known since the early years of Christianity. Try to get the congregation “out of the book or bulletin” and participate in the remembrance of God’s activity in history.

It may seem difficult at first, but many congregations have truly studied the texts of the Lord’s Prayer and determined that the “contemporary” translation communicates more clearly today.

Use real wine. Wine is a joyous, yet dangerous substance. It can “gladden our hearts” but also involves risk. And so it is with being a Christian. Lutheran Confessions teach that receiving in one kind (bread alone or wine alone) one receives the full benefit of Communion. Small amounts of grape juice may be available for persons with special needs, but it isn’t to be used as a substitute for all. (See “The Use of the Means of Grace,” principle 44).

Any kind of wine can be used. Remember that, in Lutheran understanding, the wine is not a physical “representation” of Christ’s blood. Therefore, using red wine because it looks more like blood can be misleading. A practical consideration is that white wine does not stain linen as does red wine.

Serve wine from one large cup and break the bread from a large loaf for a full expression of unity in the sacrament. If it is necessary to use individual glasses, wine should poured into the cups one at a time using a

pouring chalice so the symbolism of “one cup” is still evident. While intinction (dipping the bread into the wine) has its roots in ancient Jewish practice, it may not be perceived as actual drinking in today’s culture.

Only unleavened bread is used.

Be certain that worshipers, especially children, know that they are eating real bread. Throughout history, Christians have used either leavened or unleavened bread.

Communion is served to separate “tables” who are then dismissed separately.

Serve communion continuously, that is, once one has received the bread and wine they return to their place and the next person takes their place. Not only does this save time without rushing, it also reinforces the understanding of being one body.

Worshipers always kneel to receive communion.

While kneeling is a very appropriate posture, it reinforces an understanding of communion as a penitential time between the individual and God. Another view of communion is a joyful feast! Perhaps both postures can be freely encouraged. It may change seasonally as well, such as kneeling during Lent and standing during Easter.

During communion, silence is kept or quiet music is played.

There is nothing wrong with this, but it highlights only one view of the eucharist. Joyful, participatory singing needs to balance the quiet and reflective.

Extra bread and wine is put back in the box or bottle with other unused elements.

Bread and wine should be consumed during or after the service. If too much remains, it should be kept separate in a reverent manner to be used for the sick and homebound.

Pastors celebrate Communion with the sick, homebound or imprisoned, using bread and wine that was not part of the congregation’s worship.

Taking bread and wine used in the Sunday liturgy to those unable to be present can be a powerful way of connecting these people to the life of their congregation. This can be done by either a pastor or lay person. Texts in the liturgy to accompany this action can be found in *Occasional Services* and *Sundays and Seasons*.

Either “Thank the Lord” or “Lord, now you let your servant” is always sung immediately after Communion.

Both a canticle after Communion and a closing hymn are sung.

The SENDING

If your current practice is:

The blessing follows immediately after the prayer.

The blessing and dismissal are led from the altar or another location up front.

The pastor always announces the blessing.

Parish announcements are made earlier in the service.

The pastor says the dismissal (“Go in peace...”).

Postludes are always played.

Consider another appropriate hymn for certain seasons.

Sing either a canticle or a hymn after communion or before the dismissal. Reserve the singing of both for festival days.

Consider this:

Allow for intentional silence before the benediction. Remember, constructive use of silence must be taught.

To be clear that the liturgy has moved from Meal to Sending, the blessing and dismissal could be led from some place other than the altar. Suitable locations would be from the ministers’ chairs, from the baptismal font (emphasizing their ministry in the world is centered in their baptism), or the doors to the church (emphasizing being sent forth into the world). Depending on the architecture, the entire assembly could process to the font or out of doors for the Sending.

The blessing is rightly spoken or sung by the ordained presiding minister. It is always appropriate for a bishop, when present, to pronounce the blessing, even when he/she was not the presiding minister.

Announcements about activities of mission and education in the life of a congregation can be understood as part of the Sending. They could follow the blessing and conclude with the dismissal, “Go in peace. Serve the Lord.”

The dismissal is the responsibility of the assisting minister, preferably a lay person. The charge to be a minister in all you do throughout the week is symbolically more powerful when it comes from a colleague – another lay member of the congregation.

Consider varying the postlude practice by the seasons. For example, omit them during Advent and Lent; simple, brief pieces on “green” Sundays; and bigger pieces on “white” and “red” days.