

What does this mean?

A liturgical guide to the services of the church.

As Lutherans, we understand that the Sunday morning service is not so much for our worship of God, but rather the place where God delivers to His people the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation for the sake of Christ. The liturgy draws us to the places where these gifts are given – in the Word and Sacraments – to prepare us to receive them and assist us in our response once we have received them. Rightly speaking, our worship occurs as we *leave* the service, having been strengthened, renewed, and refreshed for the living out of our faith in our daily lives, in love toward God and service toward our neighbor.

The liturgy we use has been handed down through centuries. The church continues to use this liturgy because it so faithfully points us to Christ's presence among us and to the blessings He comes to bestow on us. As throughout the history of God's working among His people, beginning with circumcision and the sacrifices of the OT, God continues to bestow His blessings through means, i.e. the read and spoken Word, and the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion.

We also continue to use the liturgy because it is a confession of our communion in the “one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all.” (Ephesians 4:5-6) These forms, which are held in common with many others throughout Christendom, support the unity of the Church. They implant in us the Word of God (from which all the liturgy is taken), which then works itself out in our daily lives. The stability and familiarity of form enables us to rest in the service of the Gospel, so that faith may give its undivided attention to the Word proclaimed, and respond in peace with undisturbed prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

Why do we chant?

Chanting is a unique form of speech, which honors the words and makes them more distinct and easier to hear. In its purest forms, the music of chanting follows the natural flow and rhythm of the text, rather than imposing itself upon the words. Its purpose is simply to carry the words, not to interpret them. Since the liturgy is taken from the Scriptures, chanting also helps to set Divine Words apart from the routine chatter of everyday speaking.

In connection with this, we also usually chant the Psalms in our services. The Psalms are the prayer book of the Holy Scriptures, and they are a treasured heritage in teaching the Church and the children of God how to pray. They were also inspired by the Lord to be chanted or sung within the congregation of His people. For this reason, the Psalms may be described not only as a prayer book, but as a sacred hymnal. Thus, St. Paul teaches Christians to sing, “Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs,” (Colossians 3:16), as he and Silas did in prison (Acts 16:25), and as Christ and His Apostles did on Maundy Thursday (St. Matthew 26:30).

Why do we use such “old” hymns, rather than the newer contemporary music?

As aforementioned, the service is where God delivers to us His gifts. The hymns have been carefully chosen to impart to us the saving knowledge of those gifts. They help teach us the Faith. The hymns we sing are representative of the music of the Church throughout the centuries, including the 21st century, and connect us with the saints who have gone before us. Much of the newer “contemporary” music is more about our feelings toward God, rather than what God has done for us.

Why doesn't the pastor just wear a suit and tie for the services?

The various robes and other distinctive clothing worn by the pastor and other assistants contribute to the appropriate decorum of the services. These vestments are not intended to glorify or draw attention to the individual person who wears them, but actually are intended to cover or hide the person while at the same time marking and adorning the Office he bears and serves. To identify the Office in this way is to confess and give thanks that Jesus is here serving us with His own Word and Sacraments.

The black collar shirt is worn to confess that the pastor is a sinner, as we all are, but the words he speaks as a representative of Christ are holy words – hence the white throat.

The finest robes possible adorn the celebrant of the Lord's Supper out of reverence for the very Body and Blood of Christ that he administers in the name and stead of the Christ Himself. Hence you will often see the pastor don an extra “chasuble” just before the service of Holy Communion.

Why do we make the Sign of the Cross?

The sign of the Cross is the most ancient, simple, and profound of all Christian ceremonies, and also one of the most natural. Among other things, this sign is used to mark blessings received, since all blessings for us from God depend upon the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Indeed, all of our Christian hope is based on the self-sacrifice of our Lord upon the Cross. So it is not surprising that the Cross is our chief symbol, and the sign of the Cross one of our most basic ceremonies. We use this sign as a physical reminder of the gifts God has given us.

The sign of the Cross was first made upon us at Holy Baptism, when we were crucified, died and were buried with Christ Jesus (Romans 6:3-4). We recall his saving death for us, as well as the daily and lifelong implications of our Baptism into His death, whenever we make the sign of the Cross. The same things are true when the pastor traces the Cross upon us at various places in each Divine Service. The sign of the Cross helps us to pray by directing our faith to Christ the Crucified by a very simple action. It also serves to identify us to the world as people who are defined and live by the Cross of Christ.

The most historic way of making the sign of the Cross is to use the right hand, palm inward, to touch the four points of an imaginary Cross: first the forehead, then the middle of the chest (over the heart), then one shoulder, and then the other. But there are many other, perfectly good, ways to make this sign. Some people like to trace a Cross in the shape of a lower case “t” on themselves. They might even return for a fifth point back in the middle. Some like to go from their right shoulder to their left (historically, the Eastern Orthodox churches), or from their left shoulder to their right (historically, the Roman, Episcopal, and Lutheran churches). Others hold their right hand so that the tips of their index and middle fingers are touching the tip of their thumbs in a Trinitarian reference, and tuck the last two fingers into their palm as a reference to the divine and human natures of Christ. There is no wrong way, and no one “best” way, to make the sign of the Cross. Do whichever is most comfortable for you.

In our services, you will see a cross symbol ☩ at various points where many Christians have traditionally chosen to make the sign of the Cross.

Why do we sit and stand so much at certain points?

As a general rule of thumb, we sit for instruction, and stand for confession, prayer, praise and thanksgiving. Some people prefer to kneel for confession, especially where there are kneelers in the church. Sometimes these different activities are happening all at once, and one or the other setting directs our posture.

For example, we normally sit for the instruction of the Holy Scriptures, when they are read as Old Testament and Epistle in the Divine Service, and for the Sermon. We stand for the reading of the Holy Gospel, as an expression of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord Jesus Christ, since the Gospel uniquely proclaims His very words and actions. To stand for the Holy Gospel in the Divine Service also anticipates the posture of standing for the rites and ceremonies of the Lord's Supper, which are likewise characterized by thanksgiving as we hear His own Words, whereby He gives to us His very Body and Blood.

Why do we bow and kneel?

Bowing is a universal sign of reverence and respect for another, and of submission and obedience to a ruling authority (Revelation 4:10-11). In the ancient world, people bowed to emperors and kings. In part, this made them defenseless and vulnerable to attack. They laid their necks open to the king's sword, and thus placed themselves at his mercy.

We bow before the Lord God because we depend upon His mercy in Christ Jesus, though we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. The bending low of our bodies before Him is an outward gesture of the inner devotion of repentant faith, whereby we acknowledge and confess our sin, yet plead the grace of God and trust His forgiveness. We bow before the Lord in reverent faith, because we fear, love

and trust in Him alone above all other things. And we bow out of respect for His divine Majesty, because His true glory is too much for sinful mortals to behold; as even the holy angels hide their faces in the presence of the Holy Triune God (Isaiah 6:2). The physical act of bowing calls to mind all these things for us.

We also bow in submission to honor the great mysteries of the Christian faith, such as the Trinity and the Incarnation of the Son of God, which we believe, teach, and confess, but cannot fully comprehend with our finite minds. Some prefer to kneel during the points in the service which reference the Incarnation (Christ becoming man in the flesh), particularly during the reciting of the Creed and the Words of Consecration. Similarly, in keeping with the words of St. Paul, many Christians bow, "...at the name of Jesus," (Philippians 2:10), and "to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," (Ephesians 3:14), and when the *Gloria Patri* ("Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit") or another Trinitarian doxology is sung. (The latter is marked in our hymnals with a Δ before Trinitarian stanzas in the hymns.)

Why do we sing and say "Amen" so much?

"Amen" is the Hebrew word for "true." "Amen" is the church's response to God's gifts. We use it because it is our way of saying, "Gift received. I believe that these gifts are for me." Or, as Martin Luther put it in the *Small Catechism*, "Amen, Amen means: yes, yes, it shall be so!"

**Much of the material in this brochure has been taken from the Daily Services guide for the Higher Things Conferences. It is used by permission.*