

## Understanding Worship at Covenant Presbyterian Church

Why do we worship God at Covenant Presbyterian Church in the way that we do? We live in a time when there seems to be nearly as many different formats and styles of worship as there are churches. Therefore, it is quite possible that some aspects of our service are new to you. This brochure is designed to provide a quick overview of what we do in worship and why we do it. When you understand what takes place in the service, you can have a far richer experience as a worshipper with your mind and heart engaged to glorify God.

Corporate worship is a meeting between God and His covenant people in which God is honored and His people are blessed. The worship service may be viewed as a divine-human dialogue. God is the one who initiates the dialogue, calling on the gathered saints to respond. At times, God speaks to us, and at other times we speak to Him. The pastor has a dual role, sometimes addressing the congregation as God's representative and other times addressing God on behalf of the congregation. This dialogue aspect of worship is reflected in headings in our worship bulletin.

At Covenant, we strive to follow Biblical patterns, principles, and practices in worship (note the Scripture references in this brochure). It is helpful to understand the logical flow of our liturgy. Let's walk through the service to gain a better understanding of what worship at Covenant is all about. (You might want to glance at a worship bulletin as you read what follows. Words in **bold** or *italics* correspond to headings in the bulletin.)

## Preparation

If you were to enter the throne-room of an earthly king, you wouldn't do so casually or thoughtlessly. In worship, we are entering the presence of our Heavenly King. The time of preparation before the service helps us make the transition from the world to the heavenly throne-room. As we gather prior to the service, an elder makes *Announcements* pertinent to our life together as a covenant family. A *Scripture for Meditation* is printed in the bulletin for reflection, and we have a time of *Silent Prayer* in which we ask God to prepare our hearts for worship. Scriptural meditation and prayer help us to nurture the sense of reverence and awe God desires as we come into His presence (Hebrews 12:28).

## God Calls Us Into His Presence

In the *Salutation and Responsive Scriptures*, the pastor declares that we are gathered to worship the Triune God of the Bible, and he and the congregation exchange mutual greetings in the Lord (Ruth 2:4). With the *Call to Worship*, God invites His people to draw near to Him. Corporate worship is not an optional extra in the Christian life. God's call is a command, and it is both our privilege and our duty to worship together in obedience to this call. ***We Respond to God's Call*** with a *Hymn of Praise* and a *Prayer of Adoration*. All focus at this point is on the glory and holiness of our great God. Our first priority is to fix our minds on the One whom we have come to worship.

## **God Cleanses Us of Our Sins**

Having glimpsed God in His holiness, we are immediately aware of our own sinfulness (Isaiah 6:5). We offer a corporate *Confession of Sin* in a kneeling posture to express our humility before the Lord (Psalm 95:6). In this prayer, we acknowledge that we cannot enter into the holy presence of God in our sin and we call on Him to forgive us through Christ. We then stand to hear God's *Assurance of Pardon*, spoken by the pastor, incorporating Scriptural promises of God's grace. God tells us in His Word that all who have placed their faith in Christ are cleansed of their sins and clothed in Christ's righteousness. This is really good news! ***We Respond to God's Declaration*** by joyfully singing the *Gloria Patri* (with hands lifted – Psalm 134:2) and another *Hymn of Praise*.

## **God Consecrates Us By His Word**

As we prepare to hear Scripture, the pastor offers a *Prayer for Illumination* in which he asks God to open our eyes by the power of the Holy Spirit to receive the Word with understanding and faith (1 Corinthians 2:12). The Bible is God's powerful tool to consecrate us – teaching, equipping, and setting us apart for Kingdom service (Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). We are called to listen diligently, and we acknowledge the divine authority of the Scripture when the pastor declares, "This is the Word of the Lord," and we respond, "Thanks be to God." We are whole-Bible believers, and so we read an *Old Testament Lesson*, a *New Testament Lesson*, and a *Gospel Lesson*. We also sing a Psalm, acknowledging with

Christians of all ages the special role of the Psalter as a worship-book within the Bible.

The *Sermon* is an extended footnote in which the pastor explains, illustrates, and applies the Word that has been read to the hearts and minds of the listening congregation. We should listen diligently, eager to learn all God would teach us. ***We Respond to God's Instruction*** in three ways. First, we have an *Affirmation of Faith*. In the words of a classic creed, we profess that we believe all God teaches in His Word. Second, we speak to Him through the *Prayer of Church*, punctuated with the congregational plea, "Lord, hear our prayer." We pray in faith that God is all-powerful, that He loves us, and that He hears our prayers and will answer them for our good and His glory. Third, we give *Tithes and Offerings* to the Lord as a token that we offer our entire lives as a sacrifice to Him (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Romans 12:1). During the offering, we praise the Lord by singing the *Doxology*.

### **God Communes With Us at His Table**

The Lord's Supper (also called Communion or the Eucharist) is a covenantal meal in which God dines with us as His people redeemed by the blood of Christ (Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). In this act of covenant renewal, God renews His promises of grace to us in Christ and we renew our commitment to respond to that grace in faith and obedient service.

With the opening, "Lift up your hearts," the *Sursum Corda* invites us to fix our eyes on Christ in heaven. The pastor offers a *Prayer of Thanksgiving*, in which the congregation participates by singing the *Sanctus* and praying the *Lord's Prayer*. The

*Eucharistic Meditation and Prayer of Consecration* prepare us to receive from the Lord's Table. We sing a hymn during the *Distribution of the Bread* and have a time for silent prayer and reflection during the *Distribution of the Wine*.

In the Lord's Supper, we celebrate our union and communion with God and with all who are His through faith in His Son. We should participate with an attitude of joy and thanksgiving. ***We Respond to God's Gift*** by singing a *Hymn of Commitment*.

### **God Commissions Us to Go Into the World**

The pastor now gives a *Charge* for the congregation to believe and apply what the Lord has revealed to us. In the *Benediction*, God speaks words of blessing to His people as He sends us forth empowered to do His kingdom work in the week ahead (Hebrews 12:20-21). This is not a prayer but a divine proclamation as powerful as the earlier proclamation of the forgiveness of sins. We should lift our eyes and look toward the pastor as he makes this proclamation as God's representative. The Lord really sends us forth in His power and with His blessing! ***We Respond to God's Charge*** by singing the *Three-fold Amen*. In this way, we declare that we believe all God has taught us and we rest in the blessing of His grace we have received in worship. We go forth to serve King Jesus in confident faith and hope!

**Hopefully this overview of our worship service has helped you understand the meaning and flow of our liturgy. More details on the Biblical and theological foundations for our service may be found in the booklet, *The Lord's Service*,**

**available in printed form at the church and in digital form on our website. If you have any questions about worship, feel free to ask our pastor or any of our ruling elders. We hope you will be blessed as we praise God together in worship!**