

Criteria for Corporate Worship

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Centers in the message of God's Redeeming Work

All worship begins with God drawing us into a relationship with Him. We are connected to God through the redemptive work of Christ and the sanctifying process of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 9:14). The tools that God uses to accomplish this work are His Word and the Sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism.

Therefore, in our worship we should never forget to proclaim both Law and Gospel, but never as separate steps or unrelated actions. The condemnation of the Law and subsequent anger of God for our sinful behavior must always be both allowed to convict and to bring humility to our hearts, so that we can properly appreciate and cling to the awful wonder of Christ's sacrificial offering and turn over our lives to Him who has paid the price for our freedom. The freedom was so dearly bought that, although we have been freed of condemnation under the Law, we strive mightily with the help of the Holy Spirit to not to dishonor His blood by abusing it.

Responds to God with Acts of Worship moved by His Word and works

Gottesdienst "God's service for us and our service to God." (Philippians 2:7) The Service is a divine transaction between the Lord Christ and those whom He has made His holy people by the washing of the water with the Word. Our response to God must be couched in a real personal communication that contains the sacrifice of praise and service (Hebrews 13:15-16).

We are God's people, separated from the world in our corporate worship on Sundays by our public confession of sins and belief in His redemptive work. We sing His praises and humble ourselves before the God of all life who, without any merit on our part, has done so much for us. It is a response that is so humble at the confession of sins that we are stricken with the gravity of them and yet so joyous at the news of the Gospel that we break out in song and psalms of praise.

Edifies fellow Christians through Word and Sacraments: Law/Gospel

Those brought to faith through Peter's preaching on the Day of Pentecost were baptized. Joined to the Body of Christ, they "*devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers*" (Acts 2:42). The Divine Service is the liturgy of the baptized. In fact, it has been said that worship and edification are different dimensions of the same activity.

Edification is a total obedience to faith lived in an obedient life. It is a consecration to Christ, where we are lifted up and exhorted to a godly life, even as we lift up and exhort each other (Hebrews 10:25). We share in the fellowship of the Cup as a joint possession of our inheritance. It is spiritual food that is life-giving forgiveness of sins and a reminder of our covenant.

Arranges the details so worshipers can participate meaningfully

Worship is not a spectator sport in which we attend in order to be entertained like a consumer who purchases a good feeling about themselves in order to assuage the conviction of their conscience, nor are we clientele of a cultic figure in the person of a charismatic preacher.

Instead, it is a ceremony in the service of Christ. It is an opportunity for God to draw us personally into that relationship with Him, for us to personally respond to His works on behalf of us and to solidify ourselves with our fellow living stones in the spiritual house of God (I Peter 2:5).

Our mutual participation in worship is akin to our mutual sharing of Baptism unto death in Christ, for we have been born into the Body of Christ and no more can participate in being a part of that body independent of it than an eye can be apart from our body and still serve it with vision (Romans 12:4-5). Thus the rubrics and order of the rites, songs and ceremonies guide us in fully participating in that relationship with God we call a church service.

Testifies what the worshipers believe

Public confession of what we believe as a synod (Christian travelers together) and individually is important both as a means to exhort one another and hold each other up in our common faith and as a witness to the world of our kinship in Christ and what we accept as true teachings of Scripture (I Peter 2:12). Indeed, it is not just a symbol but a commandment of Christ upon which our very acceptance into Christ's body depends (Matthew 10:32; Luke 12:8-9).

For that reason the three main creeds were first set forth as truth, not because they were deemed so, but because they are an accurate and full understanding of the truth to which Scripture testifies. It is a sign of our obedience of Christ's command and an act of adoration. It is a part of both keeping us together as a community of believers traveling together as strangers in a strange land and an act of faith that helps shore that faith up in times of trouble and a remembrance to guide us in times of plenty (Hebrews 11:13).

Empowers the worshipers to pursue the calling as His servant-witnesses

In the liturgy, the baptized are served with God's Word and the body and blood of Christ and are sent back into the world to render their priestly service to their neighbor. Evangelism means being drawn to God as a 'living sacrifice' (Romans 12:1). It means that if we really believe in the Gospel, then we'll live it in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are freed, yet still slaves to Christ through our Baptism into death with Him (James 1:12).

In a Gospel-based ministry of teaching, exhortation and prayer, we become empowered by the Holy Spirit to testify boldly of our faith to others (Acts 4:31). In fact our very lives become witness to Christ working in our lives to serve others and in doing so to bring the likeness of Him to others that they might see Him in us and come to faith (I Peter 2:12). Therefore, a worship service should include missionary preaching, the truth of the Gospel and there should be evidence of support for ministry to others.