



A Field Guide: for Worship at The Vine

Before the Service

Well before you give much thought to Sunday morning worship, you can cultivate an expectation by reading through the service (emailed weekly) taking a moment to pray for those leading and serving, and for the others who will be attending with you. Branch out by praying for other churches and for those folks on the fence about going to church anywhere at all. Read the scripture passages that will be highlighted in the service. Put some skin in the game! You may be well-rewarded for the effort.

*In the parking lot, let stepping out of your car be a step *away* from the busyness and hurry of your life—which will be there, waiting for you an hour and a half later, when maybe you'll be a bit more ready for it.*

*As you are welcomed and enter the sanctuary, let that be another step, not *away* this time, but *into* a space which encourages our attention to be fully given to God. If you have been baptized, touch the water in the basin and remember the power of being crucified with Jesus into his death and resurrection—and raised to the everlasting life of his Body, the Church.*

Awaiting the service to begin, you could visit the prayer room or enjoy connecting with those around you, or perhaps have a moment to yourself.

When Worship Begins

Give it all you have. Sing out. Read with feeling. Pray sincerely. Be open to the warmth and power of God's Spirit present and moving among us. There is a big difference between "faking it" in front of others and the "sacrifice of praise," giving your all even when you really don't feel like it. God knows when you just don't have it in you, yet you praise him anyway. Sometimes simply trying is a very good thing. And when you can't even do that, we've got you. Rest your spirit in the family of God.

During the Service

There is purpose and meaning to all the "pieces" through which we can participate in worship. A liturgical service can feel like work as we are getting used to its patterns. The liturgy stretches us to think, pray, do, sing, or say out loud important and meaningful things we might not come up with off the cuff. A lot of time is spent prayerfully crafting what we do together each Sunday, all while literally picturing you and our whole church family engaging in these elements of our worship.

Call to Worship

This is an ancient practice from Old Testament times with which God's people, assembled together, briefly remind themselves what they have gotten together *for*. It is an urging to remember God's worthiness and our proper response to him. It should be said heartily. The opening prayer positions our hearts as receptive to the work of the Spirit.

Singing

For some, singing is their favorite thing to do in a worship service. They might even think of singing as the *real* worship part of the service. We could talk about the positives and shortcomings of this view all day long, but we should be aware that not everyone is like-minded on this. Sitting somewhere near you is someone just waiting for a song or hymn to be over, so they can recover their focus on worshiping God. If you're not a singer, no worries. The words are meaningful; let us sing them *to* you.

Collect

Ideally, many will already have given some thought to and prayed the Collect prayer made available in the prior week's church newsletter. These short prayers are intensely meaningful, memorable, and touch on a theme found in the lectionary Gospel reading for that given week.

Lectionary Readings

We usually offer two scripture readings during each service: one from the Old Testament or New Testament epistles and one from the Gospels. They may or may not be highlighted by the sermon, but it's crucial to hear them again and again. These appointed readings (which is called the *Lectionary*) help us walk through the whole Bible *and the seasons* from year to year—by teaching us to tell time not merely by our planet's tilt and circuit around the sun, but to order our days, weeks, and years by the Word of God and especially the events in the life of Jesus.

Message (Sermon/Homily)

Let's keep this short. At best, a sermon helps your spirit and mind be exposed to and taught the truth found in God's word. It may bring you comfort, cause some needed discomfort, or bring about a realization to which the Holy Spirit calls you to respond – and by his power, be changed to become more like Jesus and the “you” you were always meant to be.

Pastoral Prayer

Sometimes called General Prayer or Prayers of the People, this prayer touches on concerns common to our community and those we want to express for local concerns and the whole world. Often, this prayer pauses to allow anyone to lift up a name or concern before the Lord.

The Lord's Prayer

The gold standard for how to pray like Jesus. Let's pray it together. Often.

Expression of Faith

In response to the scriptures and message, we offer a hearty “We believe...” From The Vine's beginning, an expression of faith has been a feature in worship. Most often (and not only since our Anglican affiliation) it is the historic Nicene Creed or Apostles' Creed, but also some scriptural affirmations and less traditional creeds sprinkled in to keep us on our toes.

Confession Prayer

Maybe you arrive at Sunday worship with a fresh sense of repentance in your soul. Wonderful! But many do not. During the prayer of confession, rather than feeling your words are redundant (having already prayed accordingly), keep in mind we are a body of believers, a community, a family. The Church is *one* in Christ, not just a bunch of individuals. You might consider confessing our faults as a *family affair*, knowing God calls his whole Church to repentance, not just individuals.

Offering and Doxology

Not very long ago and for millennia before, tithes, gifts and offerings were brought into the house of the Lord and presented before him to be used for the work of the Church. Though much of our giving is now done online, we still think it's important to have this moment in worship to recognize our call to give generously to the work of God in the world. And the all-practical question here is: *How much to give?*

Offering and Doxology (cont.)

That's a long, worthwhile conversation. But here's a way to look at it in brief that might shake up everyone's view – which is probably good: “I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them,” C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. Our Anglican tradition upholds the principle of the tithe. We sing a “doxology” immediately after the offering is received to focus our thanksgiving on God's generosity and glory.

Passing the Peace

Few blessings are more meaningful than to share the peace of Jesus, God's shalom of the way things *ought to be* and *will be* in the age to come. We enjoy this ancient custom as a sign of love and fellowship, and to remember that among the risen Christ's first words were: “Peace be with you.”

Holy Communion

The comfort or discomfort prompted by the Holy Spirit through the service is met with an *invitation* to be in union with Jesus at a Table where he himself is both host and meal. There are times when an “altar call” is also appropriate, but on a week to week basis, there is no greater invitation than the one Jesus makes to us in the loving gifts of his body and his blood offered to those who would draw near with faith, trusting him as Savior, and learning to know him as friend. How the Lord is present in and expresses grace through pieces of bread and drops of wine is a mystery, yet with this heavenly food we are nourished to be the Body of Christ redeemed by his Blood. This is the ultimate reality we can know—for now.

Benediction

This Latin word (Benedictus) simply means “a good word or a speaking of goodness.” These words send us forth in the blessing of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to love and serve the world, until we gather again—or we find ourselves in the world to come, when all shall be well.

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