

What's Presbyterian worship like?

Worship in a Presbyterian congregation, in its shape and content, is determined by the pastor and the session, the church's governing body. It generally includes prayer, music, Bible reading and a sermon based upon Scripture. The Sacraments, a time of personal response/offering and a sharing of community concerns are also parts of worship.

The constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) suggests that worship be ordered in terms of four major actions centered in the word of God: Gathering, the Word, Giving Thanks and Sending.

Prayer. "Prayer is at the heart of worship. In prayer, through the Holy Spirit, people seek after and are found by the one true God who has been revealed in Jesus Christ. They listen and wait upon God, call God by name, remember God's gracious acts, and offer themselves to God. Prayer may be spoken, sung, offered in silence, or enacted. Prayer grows out of the center of a person's life in response to the Spirit. Prayer is shaped by the Word of God in Scripture and by the life of the community of faith. Prayer issues in commitment to join God's work in the world" (*Book of Order*, W-2.1001).

Music. "Song is a response which engages the whole self in prayer. Song unites the faithful in common prayer wherever they gather for worship, whether in church, home or other special place ... Through the ages and from varied cultures, the church has developed additional musical forms for congregational prayer. Congregations are encouraged to use these diverse musical forms for prayer as well as those which arise out of the musical life of their own cultures. To lead the congregation in the singing of prayer is a primary role of the choir and other musicians. They also may pray on behalf of the congregation with introits, responses and other musical forms. Instrumental music may be a form of prayer since words are not essential to prayer. In worship, music is not to be for entertainment or artistic display. Care should be taken that it not be used merely as a cover for silence" (*Book of Order*, W-2.1003 – W-2.1004).

Scripture. "The church confesses the Scriptures to be the Word of God written, witnessing to God's self-revelation. Where that Word is read and proclaimed, Jesus Christ the Living Word is present by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. For this reason the reading, hearing, preaching and confessing of the Word are central to Christian worship. The session shall ensure that in public worship the Scripture is read and proclaimed regularly in the common language(s) of the particular church" (*Book of Order*, W-2.2001).

"The minister of Word and Sacrament is responsible for the selection of Scripture to be read in all services of public worship and should exercise care so that over a period of time the people will hear the full message of Scripture. It is appropriate that in the Service for the Lord's Day there be readings from the Old Testament and the Epistles and Gospels of the New Testament. The full range of the psalms should be also used in worship. Selections for reading in public worship should be guided by the seasons of

the church year, pastoral concerns for a local congregation, events and conditions in the world, and specific program emphases of the church. Lectionaries offered by the church ensure a broad range of readings as well as consistency and connection with the universal Church" (*Book of Order*, W-2.002 – W-2.003).

Preaching. "The preached Word or sermon is to be based upon the written Word. It is a proclamation of Scripture in the conviction that through the Holy Spirit Jesus Christ is present to the gathered people, offering grace and calling for obedience ... the sermon should present the gospel with simplicity and clarity, in language which can be understood by the people ... the preaching of the Word shall ordinarily be done by a minister of Word and Sacrament" (*Book of Order*, W-2.2007).

"The Word is also proclaimed through song in anthems and solos based on scriptural texts, in cantatas and oratorios which tell the biblical story, in psalms and canticles, and in hymns, spirituals and spiritual songs which present the truth of the biblical faith. Song in worship may also express the response of the people to the Word read, sung, enacted or proclaimed. Drama and dance, poetry and pageant, indeed, most other human art forms, are also expressions through which the people of God have proclaimed and responded to the Word" (*Book of Order*, W-2.2008).

Sacraments. "The Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are God's acts of sealing the promises of faith within the community of faith as the congregation worships, and include the responses of the faithful to the Word proclaimed and enacted in the Sacraments" (*Book of Order*, W-3.3601).

Offering. "The Christian life is an offering of one's self to God. In worship the people are presented with the costly self-offering of Jesus Christ, are claimed and set free by him, and are led to respond by offering to him their lives, their particular gifts and abilities, and their material goods. Worship should always offer opportunities to respond to Christ's call to become disciples by professing faith, by uniting with the church, and by taking up the mission of the people of God, as well as opportunities for disciples to renew the commitment of their lives to Jesus Christ and his mission in the world" (*Book of Order*, W-2.5001 – W-2.50).

Community concerns. "Worship is an activity of the common life of the people of God in which the care of the members for each other and for the quality of their life and ministry together expresses the reality of God's power to create and sustain community in the midst of a sinful world. As God is concerned for the events in daily life, so members of the community in worship appropriately express concern for one another and for their ministry in the world" (*Book of Order*, W-2.6001).

Baptism. "In Baptism, the Holy Spirit binds the Church in covenant to its Creator and Lord. The water of Baptism symbolizes the waters of creation, of the flood, and of the Exodus from Egypt. Thus, the water of Baptism links us to the goodness of God's creation and to the grace of God's covenants with Noah and Israel. Prophets of Israel, amidst the failure of their own generation to honor God's covenant, called for justice to roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream. (Amos 5:24) They

envisioned a fresh expression of God's grace and of creation's goodness — a new covenant accompanied by the sprinkling of cleansing water. In his ministry, Jesus offered the gift of living water. So, Baptism is the sign and seal of God's grace and covenant in Christ" (*Book of Order*, W-2.3003).

"Baptism enacts and seals what the Word proclaims: God's redeeming grace offered to all people. Baptism is God's gift of grace and also God's summons to respond to that grace. Baptism calls to repentance, to faithfulness and to discipleship. Baptism gives the church its identity and commissions the church for ministry to the world" (*Book of Order*, W-2.3006).

"The water used for Baptism should be common to the location, and shall be applied to the person by pouring, sprinkling or immersion. By whatever mode, the water should be applied visibly and generously" (*Book of Order*, W-3.3605).

"Baptism is received only once. There are many times in worship, however, when believers acknowledge the grace of God continually at work. As they participate in the celebration of another's Baptism, as they experience the sustaining nurture of the Lord's Supper, and as they reaffirm the commitments made at Baptism, they confess their ongoing need of God's grace and pledge anew their obedience to God's covenant in Christ" (*Book of Order*, W-2.3009).

"As there is one body, there is one Baptism (Ephesians 4:4-6). The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recognizes all Baptisms with water in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit administered by other Christian churches" (*Book of Order*, W-2.3010).