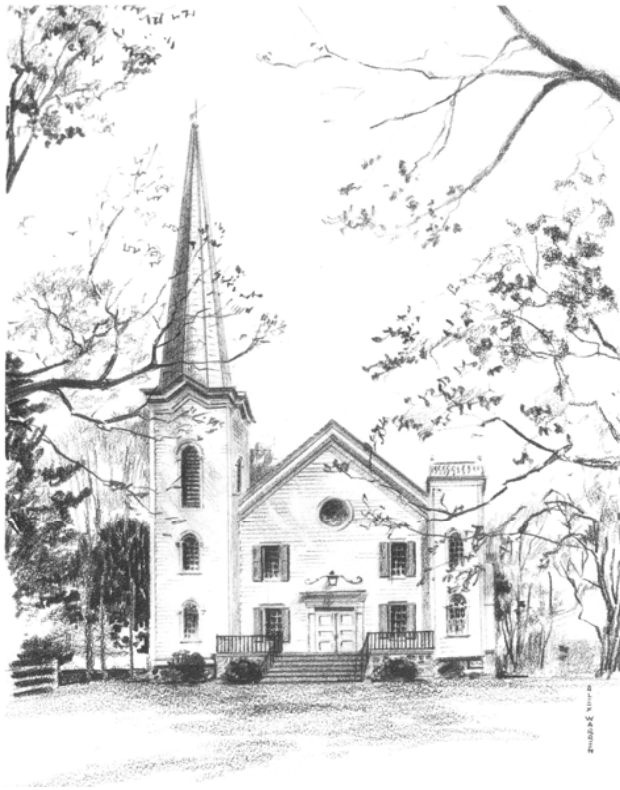


The Peapack Reformed Church

Peapack Reformed Church is a congregation called by God, inspired by the Holy Spirit and committed to being the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world.



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The Service for The Lord's Day

A short guide to the worship service
in the
Reformed tradition

**Peapack Reformed Church
Gladstone, NJ**

September 2014

The text of this booklet was originally published in the bulletin of the Peapack Reformed Church during 2005. Much of the information was taken from The Book of Common Worship published by Westminster John Knox Press in 1993.

THE SERVICE FOR THE LORD'S DAY

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Acts 2: 42*

From its very beginning, the Christian community has gathered on the first day of the week to hear the Scriptures read and proclaimed and to celebrate the Lord's Supper. This day has special significance, since it was on "the first day of the week" that the followers of Jesus discovered the empty tomb and met the risen Lord. Every Sunday, therefore, is like an Easter day. Christians gather together to offer praise and thanksgiving to God, to call upon God's grace and love, and to recall the teachings of Jesus in the proclamation of the Word and celebration of the Sacraments.

The Reformed order of worship takes its shape and movement from descriptions of early Christian gatherings found in the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and other 1st century writings. The order is a framework which allows for freedom and variety in liturgical action and affirms the role of the congregation as active participants. There are four parts to the Order of Worship: Gathering, The Word, The Response and Sending.

GATHERING

Worship begins with God. God takes the initiative and calls us into being. In the name of Christ we answer that call, assembling as the community of the faithful. The steeple bell has been rung, drawing us in, and the candles on the communion table are lit.

In preparation for worship, people may pray silently, engage in quiet meditation or consider the **Thought for Worship**. At the top of the worship bulletin, the **Header** tells us, in words and art, where we are in the liturgical year, which season or particular Sunday. The music of the Prelude helps focus attention on God's presence. Through the power and brilliance of the organ, we may feel His majesty and glory or in its quietness, God's peace.

The **Call to Worship** reminds us that our worship centers in God and not in ourselves. Every week we begin with the familiar words of the **Votum** (call): "Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth." The **Opening Sentences of Scripture**, usually from the Psalm of the day, are read or sung responsively so that the whole congregation is caught up right away in the worship experience. The **Salutation** concludes this part of the Gathering: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ", words used by Paul at the beginning of many of his letters to young churches.

SENDING

The fourth and final movement of the Service for the Lord's Day is a transition time. The gathered congregation will disperse and go back into the world, becoming apostles themselves, the "ones sent" to spread the gospel message. This part of the service begins with singing, usually an invigorating and energizing **Hymn** filled with purpose and dedication.

The **Charge and Benediction** follow. In a few words, the pastor reminds the people of what they have heard in the sermon and encourages them to follow through, with the promise of God's presence and support. The Benediction is God's blessing, a "good word" from Holy Scripture. Holding hands high, the minister offers the Benediction as a kind of Laying on of Hands upon those about to depart the sanctuary.

Following the Benediction, the congregation sits in a moment of quiet reflection accompanied by the choir's blessing in the **Choral Benediction**. The **Organ Postlude** completes the service. Some will stay and listen, while others begin to converse with one another as they move into Fellowship Hall for a time of refreshments and further conversation.

The steeple bell is rung again, signaling to the community beyond the sanctuary walls that, having been reminded, refreshed and renewed, we are heading out to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

THE RESPONSE TO GOD

In response to the reading and proclamation of the Word, the congregation is called upon to act, to do something. This may be the celebration of Holy Communion or a rite of the church such as Baptism, the reception of new members or the ordination of elders and deacons.

The **Response** begins with the **Affirmation of Faith** in the one holy catholic (universal) and apostolic church. Here at Peapack Reformed, we usually recite the **Apostles' Creed** or, on Communion Sundays, the **Nicene Creed**. Although the creeds are printed in the bulletin, many in the congregation know them by heart, the words lodged in the memory and a part of our inner being.

The **Offering**, which comes next, did not originate as a way of raising revenue for the church.

In early centuries, Christians brought to the Lord's Day assembly gifts of bread and wine from their own tables. Some was used for the Communion and the remainder distributed to the poor. Today we are reminded that our offerings are dedicated to carrying out the missions work of the church.

While the offering is being collected, there is **Offertory** music, itself a prayer of dedication. As the offering plates are brought forward, the congregation rises to sing the **Doxology**, or words of praise, affirming that God alone is the source of all blessings. The pastor then offers the **Prayer of Dedication**.

The response continues with **Prayers of Intercession and Thanksgiving**. The congregation prays for both worldwide and local concerns, including especially places and people who are in distress or suffering in any way. The prayers include particular joys and concerns which have been noted on blue cards and placed in the offering plate. Included also is a long moment of silent prayer. At the close of the Prayers, the congregation recites The Lord's Prayer as one voice.

Words of **Welcome** follow naturally after the Salutation. Here some brief announcements pertaining to the life of the congregation are given, perhaps about mission, fellowship or education. The service then continues with an **Opening Hymn** of praise, telling of God's greatness, majesty, goodness and love.

The **Call to Confession** is an opportunity for the congregation to bow in humility before God in the trusting knowledge of God's grace. In announcing God's mercy, the Call to Confession invites us to admit the brokenness in our lives. **Confession** is made in a unison prayer. We lay before God, and one another, not only those sins which may belong to us individually and personally, but also the sin of the congregation, the church universal and the world. We confess the sad and tragic aspect of our human condition. After the corporate prayer there is time for **Silent Confession**.

In the **Assurance of Pardon** we hear the gospel promises of God's redemption: Jesus Christ is the pledge of God's mercy and the hope and help for us sinners. God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We accept God's forgiveness, confident that in dying to sin on the cross, God, through Jesus Christ, raises us to new life.

As a forgiven people, set free from sin and death to live the Christian life in its full abundance, we turn to God's law as a guide and resource. A reading of the **Law of God** thus follows the Assurance of Pardon. We hear the commandments from Exodus, the great commandment to love God with all our being and our neighbors as ourselves or another summary of God's law.

The **Gloria Patri** ("Glory to the Father") is the response to the promise of God's forgiving love. With respect and confidence we stand to sing our praise to the triune God who created, redeemed and sustains us. Reconciliation with God leads to reconciliation among the people of God.

Sharing of the Peace completes the theme of reconciliation, moving the congregation toward the exchange of reconciling words and gestures with one another. The intention of sharing the peace is not to interrupt the service to engage in conversation but rather to speak to one another, friends and visitors alike, an affirming word as members of the one body of Christ. Then we join in singing a song of welcoming inclusivity as we move back to our seats, ready to hear the Word of God.

THE WORD

We hear the Word of God read from Holy Scripture, sung in hymn and anthem and proclaimed in sermon. In the Reformed Protestant tradition, the reading and proclamation of the Word is central to worship.

First, the Word is offered in the **Children's Message**. Children learn to worship by observing and participating in the liturgy; up to this point they have been doing so with their parents. Now the children are invited to come forward, sit on the chancel steps and hear the Scripture lesson told in an interactive way especially for them. After their message the children leave the sanctuary for Sunday school.

The Prayer for Illumination precedes the first Scripture reading. We pray for the Holy Spirit to be at work in and among us, calling our hearts and minds to be attentive to what we are about to hear so that we may be transformed by it.

The **Scripture readings** for the day are selected according to the Revised Common Lectionary, a three-year cycle of readings for each Sunday that includes a psalm, a passage from the Old Testament or Acts, an Epistle reading and a Gospel passage. The purpose of the lectionary is to provide guidance for using the whole range of Scripture in the church's worship.

Between Scripture readings is music – congregational singing and choir anthem. **Hymns and anthems** are chosen to reflect the message of the day as put forth in the readings. A mix of familiar, traditional hymns and ones written more recently attest to the power of the Holy Spirit to speak across the ages through inspiring song.

Along with the reading of Scripture, the proclamation of the Word in a **Sermon** is a hallmark of Reformed worship. The sermon may teach, edify, advocate or exhort, but the main purpose of the sermon is to help the congregation realize that God is alive and at work in their lives through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Following the Sermon, a brief time of **Silent Reflection** gives worshipers an opportunity to meditate on the message just received.

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

In the Reformed order of worship, the celebration of **Holy Communion**, or the **Lord's Supper**, can be thought of in two ways. One, it is a continuation of the Word of God, the Word enacted in Sacrament. Or two, as part of the Response to the Word, it is a great thanksgiving or **Eucharist**.

The meaning of the Lord's Supper is contained in the words *remembrance, communion* and *hope*.

The remembrance is of our Lord's passion on the cross and the resulting forgiveness of our sin. The communion is with our resurrected Lord Jesus Christ and the other members of that living body in our present day. Our hope is that as surely as we eat this bread and drink this fruit of the vine, we too will be raised from the dead into everlasting life, as Christ was.

But the Lord's Supper is more than a reminder of Christ's death, resurrection and ascension. It is a means given to us by Christ himself through which he is truly present as a continuing power and reality. While the meaning of Christ's sacrificial death is at the heart of the sacrament, it is a resurrected, living Christ whom we encounter through the bread and wine.

The Lord's Supper is open to all who put their faith in Christ. It is made ready for all who love God and who want to serve and love him more, including children.

At Peapack Reformed, we celebrate Holy Communion on the first Sunday of every month. The elements are distributed to the congregation seated in the pews. In January and during the summer, June through August, however, the Communion is served by intinction, or dipping of the bread into the cup, and individuals come forward to receive.