



EAST WOODS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



A Guide to our
Worship Traditions

Worship 101

CALL TO WORSHIP

Churches have begun their services this way for centuries as a way of making a clear transition from everyday life (which can also be a form of worship) to the special actions of worshipping God together. We'll often use Bible verses, especially from the Psalms, to set the tone for this transition.

INVOCATION

Literally “calling in,” this is an opening prayer to ask God to help us worship, through the presence of his Holy Spirit. Of course God is everywhere, but the Bible teaches that God likes to be specially present at certain times, especially when people gather together and ask him to be. Just as important, the invocation identifies God as the Christian Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It all acknowledges that without his help we cannot worship him rightly.

SINGING

Singing is an ancient way that groups in all cultures have communicated shared values and beliefs. Our culture doesn't sing together as much these days (we tend to listen to a lot of music instead), but it's still a powerful way to celebrate God's character and express our solidarity with each other – which what church is all about. In addition, music has a special power to communicate the beauty and order of God's world, while plowing life-giving words into our hearts and minds in a way that listening or reading alone can't do. So we sing with each other, but most importantly, we sing to God. And don't worry what you sound like – He gave you that voice!

MUSICAL STYLES

Musical tastes differ, and that's a good thing. Our ultimate desire is to reflect the musical tastes of our existing members while also directing us toward the diverse musical tastes of all our neighbors. We also want to take advantage of the best Christian songs from the past and the present. This is a tough balance to achieve, and to the extent that we pull it off, everyone won't like every song. So if you don't like the styles you hear today, please be patient, and feel free to make a suggestion.

CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

The Bible says every church is like a Body whose uniquely gifted “members” (body parts) all work together in interdependence and harmony. And so, in addition to our private prayers, we pray during the service for each other’s’ needs and struggles, for our mutual aspirations as a church, and for the peace and flourishing of our city, our nation, and our world. We’ll often close with The Lord’s Prayer that Jesus taught us to pray. Whether you pray along with the one who prays, or just listen, the congregational prayer is a great way to learn what’s important to a church.

SERMON

A central Christian belief is that God a person who wants us to know him. We believe that he has acted and spoken throughout history and in various ways. In this process he has authorized certain people to pass on what they’ve heard and seen, in writing. While preachers are not authorized to write God’s word, they are charged with the task of explaining, illuminating, and helping people apply the Word of God to their lives. Some sermons achieve this better than others, so please let the preacher know what you heard or didn’t hear, and how he might communicate God’s words more effectively to everyone. Expect the sermon to last about 40 minutes – longer than some you may have heard, but far shorter than most in history. We’ll generally alternate between a topical series and a sequential passage series, all “expository” – that is, illuminating a section of scripture.

THE SACRAMENTS

God has established two ancient rituals (Sacraments) that identify and strengthen people in the family of God. It is through The Lord's supper and baptism that the good news of God's reconciliation interacts with our physical senses. We believe that these Sacraments are means of grace, or avenues in which God helps us to believe and trust in him.

BAPTISM

The New Testament shows that when people put their faith in Christ, they are baptized. This is a ritual that involves two actions: professing your faith publicly and getting wet. All Christians believe this, yet especially since the 16th-century, we have differed about what to do with the children of Christian parents. In our Presbyterian tradition, we believe that when at least one parent is a Christian, their children should be baptized, too. It does not save them, but it marks them as members of the community of faith, where they will be raised to embrace Jesus for themselves as they grow up. When they are old enough to profess their own faith, they are able to take the Lord's Supper. If you have more questions about this, please speak with one of the pastors.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Also called Communion or the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper is a family meal established by Jesus himself. By taking it together we remember the magnitude of Jesus' sacrifice for us, uniting us to him and to each other. By taking it with *personal* faith, we re-encounter his love for us in a mystical, spiritual way. In the early church, communion was normally part of a larger meal with the whole church family, so it's appropriate to continue the feast with others after church in our homes or at restaurants.

If you believe that Jesus died and was raised to life for your sins, and if you have turned over your life to him, you belong at the table with other sinners like us. Even if you're struggling with discouragement or doubt (which is always present with faith), taking the supper can be a tangible way of re-energizing your love for God by physically receiving his.

If you are not sure where you stand with Jesus, or if you do believe in him but are consciously resisting his loving authority over your life in some way, please don't partake today. You can meditate or pray now, and you can return as often as you like until you know where you stand with him.

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

From the very beginning, the Church has used creeds and confessions to explain what Christianity is all about in a compact way. We believe that Jesus and the Bible are more important than any creed, but everyone still has to decide: Which Jesus? Which interpretation of the Bible? Unfortunately, there are a lot of conflicting answers to those questions. Because our church submits to a tradition of understanding Jesus and the Bible that stretches back to the very first churches, we use creeds that affirm what Christians have historically believed – including the Apostle’s Creed (circa 390 AD), the Nicene Creed (325 AD) and the Westminster Confession of Faith (1648 AD). Like singing, saying them together is a way of affirming shared beliefs – if you believe them, of course.

RESPONSIVE READINGS

Sometimes we have to say things out loud to remember them –and to hear others saying them, too. Since the Bible was made to be read as well as preached, some readings will be taken straight from scripture. Wise Christians have also summarized biblical truths in succinct and helpful ways. Often referred to as liturgy, which means “to praise,” we use some of these, too. Reading responsively reminds us that the God who speaks to us invites us to dialogue and reason together with him in return.

BENEDICTION

Another ancient Christian practice, the benediction means “a good word,” a blessing said by a pastor to the people on behalf of God. Benedictions remind us that a worship service is just a fraction of every week, after which we are “sent” (this is what the word *apostle* means) back into the world to love and serve God and others. We often use benedictions taken from New Testament letters, and we invite everyone to keep their eyes open, open their hands, and receive this loving commission from God.

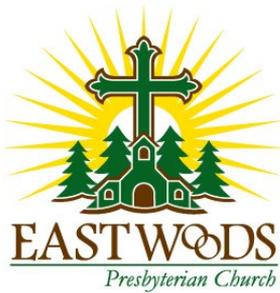
GIVING

We believe that giving is not only a practical necessity, but an act of worshiping God and contributing to the needs of others. Though some churches have used money for selfish purposes, there are legitimate uses for it, including support for the pastor and paying for facilities to meet in. In addition, the people of this church have committed to passing on at least 20% of all congregational giving to other service organizations, ministries, and individuals in need. Therefore:

If you're visiting today, and especially if you don't personally believe in Christ, please feel no obligation to give. God will provide for his church, and we're happy to serve you without any cost.

If you are committed to being an interdependent member of this body (see Congregational Prayer), we encourage you to study the bible's teaching on money, to pray for guidance, and to give freely and generously from the resources God has entrusted to you.

NOTES



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