

WORSHIP AT NORTHMINSTER

1. Northminster worship is *active and participatory*.

Liturgy stems from the Greek word meaning “the work of the people.” The “act” of worship requires active participation of the entire congregation through corporate forms of prayer, song, response, and action. This idea is best defined by Soren Kierkegaard’s illustration that worship is something you do - as he describes that even though a church sanctuary looks like a theater, it is greatly different because in worship, the prompters are on the stage, the actors are in the pews, and the audience is God.

2. Northminster worship is *biblical*.

Isaiah 6 records Isaiah’s vision of being in the presence of God. In this biblical account of worship, you will find the same elements of praise, confession, assurance, proclamation, and response that we use every Sunday morning. Also, Northminster worship is centered around the reading of the word through a format called the Lectionary which was developed by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) to give congregants a chance to hear/read as much of the scripture as possible. The reading of these scriptures, as our pastors remind us, also links us to Christians around the world.

3. Northminster worship is *structured by the liturgical church calendar*.

The liturgical calendar is structured with a pattern of preparation – celebration – growth. The church year begins with the preparatory season of Advent followed by the celebration of the season of Christmas and a season of growth, and the preparatory season of Lent is followed by the celebration of the season of Easter and a season of growth. These seasons of growth are called “ordinary time” or “growing time.” The paraments in our sanctuary reflect the seasons through the changing of colors. Purple is for preparation; white is for celebration; green is for growing time. Special Sundays of celebration – Baptism of the Lord, Transfiguration, Trinity, All Saints’, Christ the King – are also marked with the color white. Red is reserved for Pentecost and services of Installation and Ordination.

4. *“Priesthood of the Believer” is at the heart of our worship*.

We are all called to minister. Carlyle Marney said, “I do not priest me, I priest you and vice versa...a priest at every elbow is of the essence...we are priests to each other.” Our good friend, the late Cavett Taff, addressed how we should use our gifts in “priesting” one another when he said, “We all have our unique fingerprint and are bathed in a unique spectrum of the rainbow... all for a purpose and all for God.” And so, our worship is *lay planned* (the Worship and Music Committee oversees both structure and content) and partially *lay led* (with the liturgists and lay readers contributing every Sunday).

5. Northminster worship *connects us with Christians throughout the ages*.

Through our liturgical service we use ancient components of worship, even those that Jesus used when he went to worship in the Synagogue - Psalms, hymns, prayers, banners, etc.

These forms remind us that we do not worship God in a historical vacuum but are connected to God's people throughout time.

6. Northminster worship is *holistic*.

Our service invites our congregation to worship God with body, mind, and spirit. With bodies, we stand, bow our heads, pass the plate, sing the songs; with minds, our intellects are engaged by words in a sermon or a homily; the combination of what we see, hear, feel, and taste (communion) combine to allow our spirits to join in worship with our fellow believers. Our service is planned so that all members who participate are fully engaged in a sensual experience that allows us to praise, reflect, learn, and commit during the worship hour. Every element of our service carries meaning.

7. Northminster worship is *incarnational*.

We believe that the structure of the service itself mediates God's presence and message to us in powerful ways. We wait expectantly on God who graciously comes to us in our ordinary earthly ways (like an infant in a barn). While we believe that God is ever present with us, this worship service is a time we set aside to be open to God's touch, voice, message, and presence.

8. Northminster worship is *inclusive*.

Folks from varied backgrounds - different denominations, those that have chosen to be unchurched, those who have had difficult experiences with the organized church, etc. - usually feel quite comfortable in our service. Sometimes, those who are accustomed to a more evangelical, informal service have to get used to the liturgical nature of the service, but many of us who come from that background have found in it a structure and meaning that we hungered for. We truly open our arms to any and all who choose to worship with us.

9. At Northminster *the ordinances are observed regularly with reverence*.

On the first Sunday of every month and on special "holy days" (ex: Maundy Thursday), we invite the congregation to "taste" and remember as scripture commands. Both Baptism and Communion (as well as various services of dedication and installation) involve responsive reading by the congregation. Northminster follows the Baptist tradition of serving Communion once a month; however, recognizing that other liturgical traditions serve Communion weekly, Communion is available in the Chapel from 8:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. on Sundays when Communion is not served in the worship service.

NORTHMINSTER'S ORDER OF WORSHIP

Let's "walk through" our current worship service. When you think about your written order of worship that you receive as you enter the sanctuary, you will be well aware that the back part of it includes announcements that the congregation needs to know, events upcoming, opportunities for ministry, etc. We choose not to make these announcements from the pulpit because we view our sanctuary as a sacred space, and our worship hour as sacred time. The Order of Worship is designed to only include the "dialogue of worship," centering only on our task of communion with God and free of distractions.

On the cover of the Order of Worship you'll find a thought. This, like all of the written liturgy, is found/written by lay liturgists. Many times, these folks are members of the Worship and Music Committee. The cover quote is there to help our congregants begin the journey that they will take in the next hour. Sometimes the thought has to do with the sermon topic, sometimes one of the scriptures that will be read, and sometimes it's simply about the act of worship so that we are reminded why we're there.

PREPARATION AND PRAISE

Northminster begins worship in silence as we enter the sanctuary. During our time of *Preparation and Praise* at the beginning of the worship service, we offer "Meditation of Preparation." We provide a thought that will hopefully help members settle and center themselves to speak to God and to hear God in our sacred place. The prelude continues this preparation time.

With the "Call to Worship" we issue an invitation to join in the "act of worship" to all who hear.

The "Litany of Praise" is always lay led and responsive so that everyone can participate in offering praise and thanksgiving. Continued praise is offered in the singing of the Gloria Patri. This includes praise to Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Then, the "invocation" is to invoke God's presence and blessing on this appointed hour of worship.

This section to "prepare and praise" is concluded with a pastor welcoming members and visitors to this sacred hour and then reading the Old Testament and Epistle reading from the Lectionary.

CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE

We then move into a period of *Confession and Assurance*. "Confession" is a spiritual discipline that we incorporate that encourages a humble heart before God and others as - both corporately and individually - the gathered people of God confess their shortcomings and sin before God.

We participate in corporate confession (with written liturgy) so that we will be reminded that we all - each and every one of us - “fall short” and that we need a time to examine our lives and be honest with ourselves and honest before God about who we are. Doing this corporately helps us support each other and realize that we’re all in this boat together, running the race, falling, and getting back up.

At Northminster we realize that confession is not some work that we lay before the throne of God, rather, it is the simple acknowledgement that God’s Word is true and right and that when we measure ourselves against its demands, we come up short.

The silent confession gives us an opportunity to reflect on our personal journey and lift up our shortcomings and our sins of omission and commission then, in the quiet, to listen to God’s response.

What follows is a reminder of God’s infinite mercy. We call it the “Assurance of Pardon.” It might be called absolution or affirmation, but it is always a reminder that “if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” In other words, we choose to give sin and guilt their proper due, and then to silence them.

The morning (pastoral prayer) and the corporate Lord’s Prayer completes this “vertical” time of our communion with God.

INTERCESSION AND DEDICATION

Intercession and Dedication (once called Affirmation and Thanksgiving at Northminster) then offers a time to acknowledge God’s generosity and the gifts we’ve been given as well as offering us an opportunity to follow God’s example and command to “give cheerfully.” The passing of the plate, while done for practical purposes, is also symbolic of our attempt to “give something back” to the generous God we worship. The doxology continues to remind us that “all blessings flow from God.”

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

Proclamation and the Word is for us to be reminded of the truth of God’s word. We hear it through gospel reading, anthem, and sermon.

COMMITMENT/TIME OF RESPONSE

Many Baptist churches have an “invitation hymn” that is sung at the end of the service. At Northminster, we choose to offer a “time of response” with quiet music played so that everyone can reflect on the thoughts, sights, and sounds of the service and have an opportunity to reflect and respond as each member feels the need - whether it be a prayer response, a thought/silent inward commitment/response, or a response to share corporately (moving a letter or making a faith statement).

Then, the service ends with “punctuation” so to speak - with the closing hymn and a blessing through the benediction.

The postlude is usually celebratory because we have been blessed to share and participate in such a meaningful hour.

At Northminster we have modified the order of worship on a few occasions. For Lent one year, we moved the Confession to the beginning of the service with the Litany, addressing our need for redemption. And, we have added a few things over the years - after scripture reading now, the congregation responds with “thanks be to God” and our pastor begins his sermon with the “passing of the peace” to which the congregation responds.

Northminster is a very special place. The thoughtful, reverent worship hour in a beautiful, symbolic sanctuary offers all who come an opportunity to “worship the Lord in a spirit of holiness.”