Frequently Asked Questions about Our New Worship Order

**How is the new order different from our old order?**

The new liturgy has all the same elements as the old one, and many of those elements are in the same places, but there are still a number of changes. Certain elements have been renamed or modified, and a few items have been added or removed. Here is the new order in its fullest form (items in parenthesis will not occur every week):

 **Preparation for Worship**

 Silent Preparation for Worship

 Welcome and Announcements

 Musical Prelude

 **Adoration of God**

 Call to Worship

 Hymn of Praise

Prayer of Invocation (and Lord’s Prayer)

 Confession of Faith

 **Confession of Sin and Thanksgiving**

 Scripture Reading (or Ten Commandments)

 Confession of Sin

 Assurance of God’s Pardoning Grace

 (Baptism)

Psalm of Thanksgiving

 Prayer of Dedication

 Collection of Tithes and Offerings

 Anthem (Doxology, Gloria Patri, etc.)

 **Provision for Life and Growth**

 Prayer of Intercession

 Hymn of Preparation

 Scripture Reading

 Prayer of Illumination

 Sermon

 (The Lord’s Supper)

 **Response and Blessing**

 Hymn of Response

 Benediction

The first thing to notice is how the new liturgy follows a new pattern. Instead of the previous threefold pattern: The Call to Worship, The Word Comes to Us, We Respond to the Word; we now have four “cycles” that are structured by the gospel and through which God speaks and we respond. “This is essentially the pattern of Isaiah 6, the Lord’s Prayer, and the gospel itself. In knowing the true God (in praise), we know ourselves (as sinners), our need (for grace), and give thanks for His gifts in Christ.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

In addition to rearranging some items, other changes include eliminating the announcements and introductions from the congregation, adding a weekly Confession of Faith and Assurance of Pardon, changing the Scripture reading to *lectio continua* (explained below), changing how we read the Ten Commandments, singing a Psalm most weeks, and removing the Declaration of Hope.

**Why is there a Silent Preparation before the Welcome and Announcements?**

In Hebrews we are told to “offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (12:28). When we enter God’s presence in gathered worship we must come with due preparation of our hearts and minds in order to worship him in Spirit and Truth. While we have set aside ample time for our church family to speak with members and visitors (after the service and in the Fellowship Hall before the service), this time in the Sanctuary is intended for quiet preparation of the heart.

**What should I do during the Silent Preparation?**

These few minutes are intended for quite reflection, meditation, and anticipation for the service to come. Take the time to pray for your own heart and for the service; or to meditate on the sermon text; or to read over the scripture passages, prayers, and confessions in the worship order.

**What happened to the congregational announcements and introduction of visitors?**

In both the old and the new liturgy we have been careful to keep the Welcome and Announcements placed before the Call to Worship and thus outside of the formal worship service itself. Announcements have their place in the community of God’s people, but the reason we gather is to worship and so we want to emphasize that purpose.

While we will continue to welcome visitors from the pulpit and give congregational announcements regarding things pertaining to life in our church, we will no longer solicit these announcements from the congregation. If you wish to submit an announcement please send it to the church office before noon on Thursday. If there is any part of an announcement you would like to highlight then please speak to one of the pastors during the week.

As far as welcoming visitors, this is a vital activity that we do as a church and we must continue to do it well. But as our culture has changed, people also have changed and many visitors would rather blend in than be singled out. Sadly an act of public recognition designed to make people feel welcome can instead make them feel conspicuous and awkward. While we will no longer publicly identify visitors, we want to encourage each of you to personally meet and warmly welcome visitors in our services. This congregation has always been known as a friendly one and we hope we can keep that reputation for many more years!

**Why are we not beginning with the Doxology?**

The location of the Doxology is the one significant difference that our new liturgy has with the Book of Church Order of our denomination, which recommends that it is proper to begin public worship by singing this historic anthem. The new liturgy is designed to intentionally begin and end with God’s word: he brings his people to worship with a call, and he sends his people from worship with a blessing. In addition to moving the Doxology, we will also not sing it every week. Robert Rayburn points out some dangers of its overuse:

There are very few believers in our evangelical churches who realize that the doxology which is used to open the service in so many churches is actually the last stanza of three hymns written by the great Anglican Bishop Thomas Ken, who lived from 1637 to 1711…The final stanza of these three hymns is sung today by more English-speaking Christians throughout the entire world than any other single verse in existence. The problem arises from its too frequent repetition. Nothing that is used every Sunday can retain its freshness and deep meaning.[[2]](#footnote-2)

We will continue to use the Doxology, but not every Sunday. Some weeks we will sing the Gloria Patri, and in the future we may introduce new (to us) anthems from our *Trinity Hymnal*. The singing of these anthems is located at the conclusion of the cycle of “Confession of Sin an Thanksgiving” in order to give voice to the hearts of gratitude that we have just expressed in the offering.

**But isn't the offering supposed to be a response to the gospel and therefore most appropriate after the sermon?**

The placement of the offering varies in Reformed liturgies (with some even believing it shouldn’t be an element of worship at all). The offering in our new liturgy is intended to be a response to the gospel, but instead of following the sermon, it follows the Psalm of Thanksgiving as part of the cycle of “Confession of Sin and Thanksgiving.”

You may also have noticed that the name of the prayer preceding the Offering has been changed from the “Deacon’s Prayer” to the “Prayer of Dedication.” As those charged with the collection and distribution of the tithes and offerings, the Deacons rightly offer this prayer as they lead us in giving; therefore the name change simply emphasizes the nature and intent of the prayer.

**So what is the Gloria Patri?**

Sometimes known as the “lesser Doxology,” the Gloria Patri is a short hymn of praise for the triune God. It “played an important part in combatting Arianism and popularizing the doctrine of the Trinity. It was known in its present form by the end of the fourth century.”[[3]](#footnote-3) It was also often associated in church history with the Lord’s Supper, so we will usually use it on those Sundays.

**Why is there such a focus on creeds and confessions?**

Creeds and confessions have a long history in Christian worship, dating back to the early church and even appearing in Paul’s letters (Rom 10:9-10; Phil 2:6-11; 1 Tim 1:15-17; 3:14-16). While they have primarily served as tools to unify and disciple the church, Carl Trueman identifies their role in worship in his comments on Philippians 2:

There is no opposition or difference between doctrine and doxology here: the expression of praise is rooted in, constituted by, an expression of the theology. This is a vital point, and we do well to remember that our creeds and confessions are not simply boundary markers but also that they arise out of a desire to praise God, the content of which praise should be the same as that of said creeds and confessions.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In addition to the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, we will use excerpts from other historic creeds and confessions, including the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and Luther’s Small Catechism.

**Why are we reading Scripture that doesn’t have anything to do with the sermon?**

The Apostle Paul wrote in his first letter to Timothy to “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture” (1 Tim 4:13). While reading a Bible passage and preaching on it has always been a central part of worship, it seems clear from this passage (and others) that there is a place in worship for additional passages to be read. We believe that God speaks though his word, so we want to fill our services with the word of God.

The public reading of Scripture is a means of grace. It not only serves as an opportunity whereby we openly and corporately sit under his word – acknowledging his authority, acknowledging our dependence upon the initiative of his self-revelation, acknowledging our glad surrender to the lordship of his word – but it is also a God-appointed means whereby we are strengthened by and receive his favor. The Lord has deigned to bless and edify his people by it.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Different traditions have historically chosen these scripture passages by different methods: many in the high church read smaller sections according to the church calendar; others employ *lectio selecta* (our current method of selecting a text to read that is related to the sermon); others choose by *lectio continua* (the practice of reading consecutively through books of the Bible). By employing the method of *lectio continua* we will complement the preaching text by usually reading from the opposite Testament and thereby over a period of time read through the entirety of God’s word together.

**Why do we have an Assurance of Pardon and what is it?**

While some people may confuse this with the Roman Catholic practice of absolution, it is actually something we have often done in worship at CRPC and are now just making note of it in the worship order. Michael Horton explains its place in Protestant worship:

To many, the very word absolution sounds sacerdotal (i.e., according divine power to the minister himself). But it is part of the ministry of the Word. The minister has no inherent power to forgive sins, but Christ does, and he has called his ministers to proclaim in his name both law and gospel, to close the gate of heaven, and to open it by the ministry of the Word…Whereas ministers themselves might be inclined, depending on their personality, either toward legal rigor or sentimental leniency, the ministry of the Word guarantees that people will receive God’s appraisal and approval just as he has offered it in Scripture.[[6]](#footnote-6)

After our Confession of Sin, the pastor will read such passages as Psalm 51:17; 103:8-10; 130:3-4; Romans 8:1-2; Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 1:9; 2:1-2.

**Why are we singing Psalms?**

The Book of Psalms has often been referred to as the hymnbook of the Bible. These are the songs sung through the ages by God’s people during worship; even Jesus sang many of the Psalms, most noticeably on the night before his death (Matthew 26:30). Paul instructs the church to “address one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs”(Eph 4:18) and to sing “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col 3:16). Some of our brothers and sisters in Christ believe that Psalms are the only appropriate music for public worship – this view is called *exclusive psalmody.* While we appreciate their careful exegesis of such texts, we believe these passages instruct us to write and sing additional scripture-based and scripture-inspired songs in worship. However, most of the modern church has swung the pendulum the other way to *only* sing hymns and spiritual songs (*exclusive hymnody*), to the exclusion of the Psalms.

It is our goal to find the happy middle ground of *inclusive psalmody* that includes both Psalms and scriptural songs in our liturgy. In his introduction to the Psalter published by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), G. Duncan Lowe explains how this practice will deepen the content and experience of our worship:

The Psalms do not make our emotions and hopes their starting place. What they do for us is offer a way, through Spirit-given words, by which the worshiper can join himself both with the hopes and feelings of Israel’s flawed but great king David, and also with those of David’s divinely-great successor, the Messiah Jesus. The Psalms, as worship-songs and prayers, prepare us to take our place in the kingdom under various conditions in the world and in our lives. Comfort, indeed great comfort, is offered by the Psalms, but comfort is not usually their main point. The Psalms call us to faith and to work – to the work of prayer and self-discipline, of repentance and rededication – if we really want to see the goodness and beauty of God manifested. They also offer us a real experience of the presence of God along the way.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Over the next few months and years we will usually sing at least one Psalm in both the morning and evening service. Some of these will be familiar as they come from our *Trinity Hymnal*, while others will be new to many of us. We will try to sing Psalms to familiar tunes, as well as hope that unfamiliar words and tunes will soon become familiar and beloved by our congregation.

**How is our use of the Ten Commandments different?**

Historically, Reformed and Presbyterian churches have read God’s Law when the Lord’s Supper is observed. This practice serves to remind God’s people of their sin and need for grace, as well as point them to Jesus and the forgiveness he offers. In this sense, “The Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith” (Gal 3:24).

Traditionally, we at Covenant Reformed have read the full version of the Law. In our new liturgy we will read the Law in different formats: a short version and a long version. The short version consists of just the first verse of each commandment, thus shortening commandments 2, 3, 4, 5, and 10. While the reasons annexed to these commandments are important, it is not necessary to read the Law it its entirety every time. When we read the longer version it will be from the English Standard Version (ESV) reading in the back of the pew Bibles instead of the King James Version (KJV) printed in the *Trinity Hymnal*. We use the ESV translation for all of our other readings in worship, so it is wise to learn and recite the Commandments from the best available translation.

**Where is the Declaration of Hope?**

As mentioned above regarding the placement of the Doxology, we have removed the Declaration of Hope in order that God’s blessing may have the last word.

**Why have we moved the days on which we celebrate the Lord’s Supper?**

In our new monthly schedule we will celebrate the Lord’s Supper during the morning service on the first and third Sundays, and the evening service on the fifth Sunday. We are shuffling these dates for two reasons. First, we want to add an opportunity for this important sacrament during our evening worship service without taking away from either of the two scheduled times per month in the morning. Secondly, we want to pair together our taking of the Lord’s Supper with our meals together on the first Sunday of each month. This pattern follows the tradition of the early church to celebrate the Lord’s Supper together with a common meal (1 Corinthians 11:17-44).

If you have any questions or concerns about any of these changes, please speak with an elder or one of the pastors. We sincerely hope that we will all come to love and participate more and more in the joy of worshipping our triune God together with reverence and awe.

1. Terry Johnson, Leading in Worship, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Robert Rayburn, O Come, Let Us Worship, 218. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Terry Johnson, Leading in Worship, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Carl R. Trueman, [The Creedal Imperative](http://www.wtsbooks.com/the-creedal-imperative-carl-trueman-9781433521928%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), 136–139. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Terry Johnson, “Reading and Praying the Bible in Corporate Worship” in Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship, ed. Philip Ryken, Derek Thomas, and J. Ligon Duncan, 145 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Michael Horton, A Better Way, 152, 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. G. Duncan Lowe, The Book of Psalms for Worship, v. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)